In her 2023 State of the State address, Governor Kathy Hochul committed New York State (NYS) to a bold vision: transforming customer experience at every level of government service. To achieve this, the Governor appointed Tonya Webster as New York's first Chief Customer Experience Officer and established the Office of Customer Experience within the Executive Chamber to oversee this priority. Under Webster's leadership, the Office of Customer Experience has developed a comprehensive customer experience strategy anchored in 3 Customer Experience Pillars - commitment to excellence, innovative solutions, and customer-centric design. Since its inception, many agencies have taken significant strides to evolve how they serve New Yorkers, laying a solid foundation to scale the customer experience strategy.

This effort, coined the New York Experience (NYX), reflects our goal of providing the best government experience for those that we serve. We are driving this commitment forward with five key measures to track progress:

- **Closing Gaps:** We will address disparities in participation rates by ensuring that all eligible people have equal access to vital state programs or services.
- **Reducing the Time Tax:** We will work to eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic processes that hinder timely service delivery.
- **Enhancing Operational Efficiency:** We will streamline internal workflows to improve overall productivity and employee experience.
- **Improving the Digital Experience:** We will modernize online interactions to make them more user and mobile friendly.
- **Increasing Customer Satisfaction:** We will work to ensure that every New Yorker feels supported, heard, and valued throughout their interactions with state services.

To make certain that these priorities remain at the forefront, we are establishing the state's first NYX Task Force. This Task Force, comprised of agency leaders, will convene quarterly to share best practices, address common customer pain points, and will monitor the progress of our strategy. This group will also help prioritize inter-agency initiatives that have a high impact on the key NYX measures.

We are also pleased announce the launch of the NYX website (experience.ny.gov). The NYX website will provide transparency on our key measures, highlight customer experience use cases, offer playbooks to support agencies, and showcase ongoing efforts to make government work better for everyone. By making our strategy and resources available to all, we aim to build public trust and further empower agencies.

Customer Experience Highlights

In just one year, the Office of Customer Experience has made significant progress, delivering tangible benefits to New Yorkers, and demonstrating that the NYS government is working in new and impactful ways for the people we serve. By leveraging data, engaging in conversations with New Yorkers, and developing use cases to identify and prioritize customer pain points, we are transforming how government operates. These efforts have led to impressive outcomes across the three Customer Experience Pillars: commitment to excellence, innovative solutions, and customer-centric design.

COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH): NYSDOH has implemented several changes within their agency to continuously improve their service delivery to New Yorkers. Over the last year, NYSDOH has made changes to the administrative renewal process for Medicaid, which closed enrollment gaps by 20% over the prior year. The agency also enhanced the Medicaid application process by making it more mobile-friendly for 3.4 million users and implementing updates to the income verification processes, significantly reducing application processing times. These improvements have cut the time that it takes for a New Yorker to apply for Medicaid by 30 minutes, streamlining access to essential healthcare services. In addition,

- NYSDOH made enhancements to the call center Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems to improve the Medicaid renewal process. Updates include specific messages focused on Medicaid renewals, shortened IVR sections, and expanded language access to streamline interactions for callers. Improvements were also made for non-English-speaking and limited English proficient callers. These customers can now request and receive a call-back, complete IVR-based surveys in nine languages, and access website-related information in their selected language while waiting in the phone queue. These updates have significantly reduced the time tax burden for these customers who previously endured extended wait times to reach a live agent capable of assisting them in their preferred language.

- NYSDOH received direct feedback from customers about ways they could improve the Medicaid renewal process. The agency partnered with the Federal teams from the U.S. Digital Services Office, they used human-centered design approaches, and they worked directly with New Yorkers to co-create a better process for renewal letters. The focus groups voiced concerns that the envelopes containing the notice of their Medicaid renewals did not have a call to action that alerted them that it was time to renew their coverage. As a result, many customers would not open the envelope and missed the opportunity to act. With that feedback, NYSDOH redesigned the envelopes with a renewal call to action in big, red font. NYSDOH saw an immediate lift in enrollments which helped close enrollment gaps.

Department of Tax and Finance (DTF): In partnership with Code for America and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), NYS piloted the Direct File Tax program earlier this year, empowering over 12,000 New Yorkers to file their taxes directly with the state and IRS for free. Approximately 95% of New Yorkers who used direct file federally have finished their state return on the platform. This streamlined process reduced the time to complete a tax return by 76%. In addition, 55% of New Yorkers surveyed during the pilot reported paying for tax preparation services last year and were pleased that they were able to file for free this year. This pilot program, which will be expanded in the coming tax year, had a positive impact on affordability, time tax reduction, and boasted 98% customer satisfaction from participants.

Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC): HESC is committed to helping students and their families pay for college and is always thinking of new ways to engage students and their families through their programs. In 2024, HESC transitioned from exclusively in-person events to primarily virtual offerings. These virtual events allow New Yorkers to learn about financial aid programs and receive assistance with completing applications from the comfort of their homes or any location with an Internet connection. This transition has significantly expanded HESC's reach, enabling them to assist more individuals, including those who previously faced barriers such as transportation, childcare, linguistic challenges, safety concerns, or other limitations. Since September 2023, HESC has hosted 288 virtual events, resulting in an impressive 350% increase in attendance. In addition,

- HESC drove operational efficiencies by switching from paper-based flyers and other printed materials to the use of QR codes at events. Now, students simply scan a code with their phones to access information directly on HESC's website, streamlining the process and enhancing the overall digital experience. This shift has not only improved convenience for students but also resulted in a 91% reduction in printing costs in this area, reflecting HESC's commitment to sustainability and operational efficiency.

- HESC has enabled digital capabilities for their customers by adding the e-signature option for some applications and contracts. This modernization has significantly reduced the need to mail signed documents to HESC and has streamlined the process for both customers and state employees. This change has seen high adoption rates with New Yorkers. For example, 99% of Excelsior scholarships applicants use the e-signature option versus traditional wet signature.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): This year, the DMV enhanced its live chat capabilities, expanding support to cover all customer inquiry types – doubling its range. This improvement has led to improved operational efficiencies and enhanced customer service by reducing the need for phone-based assistance. The DMV Contact Center now manages an average of 4,000 live chats per month, with an average wait time of less than one minute, substantially reducing the time tax burden on customers. These changes not only improve customer satisfaction but also streamline operations by decreasing call volumes.

Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC): The HESC website underwent a complete redesign with a fresh look and enhanced user experience, making it more intuitive and user friendly. The new and improved interface has seen a 63% increase in monthly views. The Apply for Tuition Assistance feature alone saw a 12% rise in use due to the improved experience. Operationally, the improved site saw a 56% reduction in users needing to contact HESC directly with questions. Feedback from students, parents, and high school counselors has been overwhelmingly positive with over 1.2 million active users on the site since its launch in May 2024. This represents a 30% increase in traffic compared to the same period last year. In addition,

- HESC has streamlined the way high school students, and their families engage with its newsletters and communication preferences, fostering inter-agency collaboration and providing New Yorkers with improved access to higher education information. In May 2024, the program expanded to include college students, further broadening its reach. HESC now has 800,000 unique SMS and bulletin subscribers, marking a 32% increase from 2023 with an impressive average site engagement rate of 75%. These updates demonstrate HESC's commitment to engaging New Yorkers and effectively sharing information about services they may be eligible for, helping to ensure more residents can access opportunities for higher education.

Office of General Services (OGS): Improving the digital experience is a key portion of the NYX strategy. To help support this goal, the state has hired additional staff dedicated to maintaining and updating websites, ensuring that they remain accurate and fully operational. Throughout 2024, the team successfully overhauled 12 websites, leading to a 244% increase in usage. In addition,

- Our digital experience research revealed that many New Yorkers found the Find Services webform on NY.gov difficult to navigate, which limited its use as a resource for users looking to identify the types of state services that are available to them. In response to this feedback, the agency worked to simplify the form and user experience, leading to a 553% increase in usage. These changes to the digital experience significantly improve access to essential information about vital services for New Yorkers.

- New Yorkers seeking professional licenses found the online system cumbersome, with 21% reporting frustration. This is the main pathway for approximately 25,000 cosmetologists and 12,300 barbers to register their businesses and renew licenses. In a partnership with the Department of State, OGS was able to identify problem areas with the process and worked to improve the user experience. Since implementing the changes, complaints have decreased by 50%.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): Leveraging virtual assistant technology, the DMV launched an updated License Status Chatbot feature for customers in July 2024. The new chatbot supports between 5,000 to 7,000 customers per week. This new capability allows customers to receive critical information about the status of their driver license and how to address open suspensions or revocations without speaking to an agent. This process has significantly decreased handling of these calls and reduced wait times for the call center, resulting in improved operational efficiencies.

Office of General Services (OGS): New York State is working to enhance its understanding of how users engage with online government services and websites by improving data collection and analytics. Currently, agencies have inconsistent tracking and reporting, which limits their ability to identify user pain points and implement improvements. This year, a comprehensive digital survey was conducted across all agencies to assess existing resources and how data and key performance indicators (KPIs) are used. To gain deeper insights into the customer journey, a universal analytics program will be launched to track the 375 million monthly events on NYS websites. The pilot program is set to begin in October 2024 and will guide our ongoing efforts to improve government websites and better serve New Yorkers.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): This year, DMV launched an IVR Customer Satisfaction Survey in its call center to help gather valuable data to improve customer service, identify gaps in training and service offerings, and celebrate the agents who receive positive customer reviews. On average, the department receives 12,500 surveys per month with a scoring system where 1 indicates excellent service and 4 indicates poor service. To date, our frontline agents and automated systems score 1.2. or excellent. These numbers demonstrate strong customer satisfaction for those being served by the call center.

New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH): In late 2023, NYSDOH began working with the U.S. Digital Service (USDS) team to support efforts in redetermining eligibility for public program enrollees following the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. This initiative involved reassessing eligibility for nearly 9 million individuals who had been continuously enrolled in Medicaid, Child Health Plus, or the Essential Plan—some for over three years—due to pandemic-era federal rules and flexibilities. The primary focus of the USDS engagement was to increase the rate of New Yorkers automatically or administratively redetermined eligible for health insurance. By leveraging technology, NYSDOH implemented systems to auto-enroll New Yorkers into the programs, resulting in a substantial improvement in administrative renewal rates. NYSDOH set a target administrative renewal rate of 50% and has exceeded expectations, achieving an impressive rate of approximately 70%. This achievement highlights the agency's commitment to ensuring continued access to health coverage for New Yorkers.

CONCLUSION

New York State's customer experience efforts have earned recognition well beyond state lines, positioning the state as a leader in customer experience innovation. The pioneering work in customer experience has drawn collaboration from the White House, federal agencies, other states, and leading academic institutions. Every agency has a customer it serves - whether improving direct public service delivery or improving internal processes.

As we continue to expand and scale these strategies to all agencies, it is important that we continue to listen to the needs of New Yorkers, adapting and innovating to meet their evolving expectations.

As we move forward, New York State is poised to lead the nation in delivering a customer experience that puts people first. From early successes, such as innovative tax filing solutions and enhanced digital services, to our ongoing efforts, these achievements mark the beginning of a transformative journey. Through the dedication of our agencies, collaborative initiatives that prioritize New Yorkers, and strategic partnerships, we are laying a foundation that will shape the future of government services.

Together, we are reimagining what it means to serve the people of New York.