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OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

April 26, 2001

Mr. Walter G. Hoefler
Director
New York State Office for the Aging
2 Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12223-1251

Re: Report 2000-F-35

Dear Mr. Hoefler:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution, and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law, we have reviewed the actions taken by officials of the State Office for the Aging (SOFA) as of February 26, 2001, to address the issues contained in our study report, *Aging of New York State's Population (Report 97-D-14)*. That report, which was issued on October 9, 1998, studied the actions being taken by the State to develop and coordinate long-term plans to meet the challenges of the growing elderly population.

Background

SOFA promotes, coordinates, and administers Federal, State, and local programs and services for New York residents aged 60 or older. The age of New York's population has been rising, with projections by the United States census showing that the first major impact of the aging of the baby-boom generation is expected in the year 2010. This growth in the elderly population of the State will challenge the system of support and services currently available, leading to the need for new policies and programs. These supports and services include but are not limited to economic security, health care, long-term care, nutrition, transportation, and housing. These supports and services have traditionally been provided by a number of State agencies, including SOFA, the State Department of Health, the State Department of Transportation, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, and the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal. SOFA is the designated agency within New York State to promote, coordinate and administer programs for the elderly.

SOFA has established a network of 59 local area agencies on aging (area agencies) to plan, coordinate and provide services. The major State-funded programs are Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Community Services for the Elderly (CSE). EISEP provides non-medical in-home services, case management,

non-institutional respite, and ancillary services to the functionally impaired who need assistance in daily living. SNAP provides funds for home-delivered meals, congregate meals, and other related nutritional services to the nutritionally at-risk. CSE fills gaps in services and provides funding to support the needs of older New Yorkers and their families. Examples of services that are available include transportation, shopping assistance, adult day care, and homemaking and housekeeping services.

Summary Conclusions

In our prior study, we found that, while SOFA and other State agencies had developed and carried out programs to meet the needs of the growing elderly population, the State's planning and service delivery were somewhat fragmented. We found that the demand for a range of State-provided services to the elderly would continue to increase. We indicated that SOFA should consider assuming a leadership role in initiating and facilitating the comprehensive long-term planning necessary to ensure that the State could meet its older citizen's needs, including those related to long-term care, nutrition, housing, transportation and economic security.

We also found that, while SOFA acted as the lead State agency for older New Yorker programs, many of the services were provided by other State agencies. Such a system required a great degree of coordination to ensure that the elderly were receiving all appropriate services. We noted that greater coordination should result in more effective and efficient use of State resources, and that the deliberate and seamless integration of elderly services into mainstream services provided by many State agencies may ensure that a greater number of the State's elderly were served. We indicated that long-range planning and improved coordination would help ensure the State was providing the best services possible to its older residents.

Our follow-up review found that SOFA has taken actions to address the issues raised in our prior study.

Follow-up Observations

Issue for Further Consideration 1

Initiating a process for long-term planning through the year 2010 to account for the expected increases in the elderly population?

Update on Agency Action - SOFA has initiated a long-term planning process in an effort to raise awareness of New York State's growing elderly population and the challenges that this growth will pose to the current system. SOFA has developed two reports, *Project 2015: The Future of Aging in New York State, Articles and Briefs for Discussion, and Demographic Projections to 2025*. These reports were developed as part of a special initiative called "Project 2015." SOFA and the State Society on Aging of New York initiated Project 2015 to stimulate planning for the State's growing older population and the aging of baby boomers.

Project 2015 provides a series of papers focusing on how the future of aging New Yorkers will evolve and what can be expected of services and benefits for this aging population. The

issues and priorities identified by Project 2015 will figure prominently in the development of the next State Plan on Aging, covering the 2003-2007 period. The plan is to be submitted to the Federal Administration on Aging in September 2003. The information will enable SOFA to set forth the manner in which its responsibilities under the Older Americans Act will be carried out over the Plan period. Issues raised by Project 2015 will be considered in subsequent four-year planning cycles as well.

Demographic Projections to 2025 includes population projections for New York State from 1995 to 2025. These estimates indicate the changes in the age 60 and older population, and the more rapidly growing age 85 and older group. The demographic information is intended to be used to: assist policy and decision makers in seeing the impact of various population trends; enable planners to apply population information to programs and services; provide detailed information about New York's changing population that can be discussed in classrooms and by groups interested in issues affecting older adults; and aid researchers and others to disseminate the information through various publications to highlight the dramatic trends that lie ahead. In an effort to disseminate this information, SOFA has hosted a series of community forums throughout the State to discuss issues raised in the report and to generate feedback. Additionally, SOFA officials stated that Demographic Projections to 2025 is available on their website and Project 2015 will be available on their website in the near future

Issue for Further Consideration 2

Pursuing increased and improved coordination among the appropriate State agencies to provide a cohesive approach to the planning and delivery of efficient and economical services to the growing elderly population?

Update on Agency Action - SOFA has taken a number of steps to pursue increased coordination among State agencies. SOFA works with the Department of Health (DOH) to disseminate information and outreach at the local level regarding the EPIC (Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage) program. SOFA also works with DOH to coordinate reviews of managed long-term care plans, and with the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to train staff who work with older persons. Further, SOFA is working with the State Education Department to promote the "Teaching Youth About Aging and the Aging Process" curriculum. SOFA believes that this will help to prepare them to provide services to the elderly in 2015. SOFA has also targeted organizations outside State government in its efforts to coordinate existing services and to prepare for the aging of the population. For example, SOFA has been coordinating with the Medical Society of New York on training for physicians on gerontological issues.

Further, to prepare for the demands of the growing elderly population, SOFA is currently developing administrative guidelines for the implementation of a Federally-funded initiative to support family caregivers of frail elders living within local communities. Currently, funding is being provided to 17 of the 59 area agencies to support this program. Project 2015 is also part of SOFA's efforts to help policymakers focus on the demands of the growing elderly population by providing them with trends on emerging issues and encouraging leaders

in government, business and human services to define and choose strategies to meet future needs.

Issue for Further Consideration 3

Identifying opportunities in nutrition, housing and transportation to serve the unmet needs of the elderly today, and to prepare for the demands of larger elderly population in the years to come?

Update on Agency Action - SOFA has identified a number of new opportunities to help serve the unmet needs of the elderly, as they relate to nutrition, housing, and transportation. Regarding nutrition, SOFA is working with DOH's nutrition program to coordinate information, activities, policies and the monitoring of nutrition-related activities at the local level. Also, SOFA held a statewide teleconference that addressed the nutritional needs of older persons, and it has been working with the Department of Agriculture and Markets to provide coupons to seniors so they can purchase fruits and vegetables at farmers markets at discounted prices. To aid in locating housing, SOFA is currently developing an online housing fact sheet. The purpose of the fact sheet is to help caregivers, the elderly, and service providers find housing that meets the special needs or financial situations of older New Yorkers. To address concerns about elderly drivers, SOFA has developed a report entitled "*When You Are Concerned: A guide for families concerned about the safety of an older driver.*" The report offers insight on how to seek out community transportation services for the elderly population. Additionally, SOFA shares information with local area agencies about unmet needs and emergent issues to encourage them to address the growing need for transportation services, and has representation on the Governor's Traffic Safety Council. SOFA has also worked with the Department of Motor Vehicles on the Older Drivers Initiative, and with the Department of Transportation (DOT) in reviewing and approving applications for the "Section 5310 Program" (a Federal program that makes money available for the purchase of vehicles to assist in carrying out transportation activities for the elderly).

Issue for Further Consideration 4

Identifying and reaching agreements with those agencies, such as, but not limited to, DOT and DHCR, that will be responsible for the expansion, development, administration and funding of specific programs for the elderly?

Update on Agency Action - As discussed previously (Issue for Further Consideration 3), SOFA is working with DOT to review and approve funding applications to purchase vehicles for transportation activities for the elderly. In addition, to provide a better conduit for service provision, SOFA has been working with DOH to help ensure that information on where (clinics) elderly citizens can obtain flu shots is made readily available, and to ensure that these clinics are getting the necessary medication to administer the vaccines. The information is available on DOH's website and over the phone. SOFA is also working the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council to access grant dollars for the development of a curriculum that provides guidance to grandparents raising developmentally disabled grandchildren. Additionally, SOFA has entered into an agreement with OCFS to hold an adult abuse conference and provide other training activities. Furthermore, SOFA has developed a close working relationship with the State University of New York's School of

Social Welfare, and is working with OCFS on developing guidelines for a new \$1 million program targeted to persons who are caregiver relatives. SOFA has also had some ongoing discussions with the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) on developing programs for older New Yorkers.

Auditors Comments - While SOFA has some on-going projects/collaborations with DOT and DHCR, it does not have any Memoranda of Understanding in place to guide these efforts. Also, the collaboration with DHCR needs to be better defined as to its specific objective. We believe that having formal agreements with the agencies with whom SOFA is collaborating should result in more effective and efficient uses of State resources by ensuring there are clearly stated objectives and goals to guide these efforts.

Issue for Further Consideration 5

Including the agencies involved in planning which are not currently represented in collaborations to identify additional strategies and services?

Update on Agency Action - SOFA facilitated a workgroup with representatives from the State Office of the Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit and Health Care Bureau, DOH, the State Division of Criminal Justice Services, the Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled, and the Office of the State Comptroller on Operation Restore Trust (ORT). Federal partners included the Administration on Aging and the Office of Inspector General. Additional partners included Medicare carriers and medical equipment providers. ORT is a Federally-funded, long-term initiative to develop innovative ways to fight fraud, waste, and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid using developed materials to educate Long-Term Care Ombudsmen Program and Health Insurance Information Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP) volunteers, senior center members, health care providers and the general public on how to identify and report fraud, waste and abuse. SOFA believes that if fraud, waste and abuse go undetected, it can result in beneficiaries not receiving services, receiving unnecessary services, or receiving inappropriate services. HIICAP, which trains volunteers in health insurance options for the elderly, has developed a partnership with insurance companies and State agencies to help ensure that HMO's serving the elderly are communicating with the population they serve. As a result of HMO's withdrawing coverage from specific counties, HIICAP programs have been established in each county or planning and service area, to help older adults understand health insurance issues and pursue alternative care. SOFA has also provided regional training sessions on alternative options for seniors who have lost coverage.

Issue for Further Consideration 6

Seeking best practices in our own localities and in other states and nations relating to the delivery of services to the elderly?

Update on Agency Action - SOFA staff participated in the planning and implementation of the national conference of State Health Insurance Programs. Staff also participated in planning the upcoming 2001 conference, which will focus on sharing best practices and on improving

health insurance counseling programs. SOFA staff are also active participants in the Statewide HIICAP Consortium, a group dedicated to information sharing, training and technical support for local HIICAP programs. SOFA used a videoconference (a best practice learned from another State) to train large numbers of people simultaneously on issues related to Medicare. SOFA is also co-hosting a National Teleconference on ORT to be initiated in June 2001, which will feature technical assistance and strategies on forming partnerships and coalitions to better reach underserved or unserved populations.

In an effort to implement screening procedures to identify older individuals who are at high nutritional risk, SOFA has sought out information from a number of other States on what has worked well and what approaches should be avoided. As a result of this effort, SOFA has received information from the States of New Jersey, Colorado, and Vermont. Based on this information, staff from SOFA's Division of Local Program Operations have drafted a technical assistance memo on implementing nutrition screening activities which will have an attachment entitled "*Tips from Other States on Working with Older Adults as They Complete the DETERMINE Checklist.*"

In January 2000, members of SOFA's executive staff talked with staff from the Pennsylvania Department of Aging to gain assistance in selecting a computer software system to assist SOFA in data collection/reporting, and to gain an understanding of their State's work with localities as the transition to a computerized data collection system was carried out. As a result, SOFA has implemented many of the suggestions from Pennsylvania during its transition from a manual reporting system to an electronic system.

Issue for Further Consideration 7

Continuing to advocate and monitor implementation of the Long Term Care task Force recommendations?

Update on Agency Action - The Long-Term Care Integration and Financing Act (Act) implemented many of the task force recommendations. The Act allowed for the establishment of 24 newly managed long-term care demonstration projects currently operating or under development. SOFA has been working with DOH's Office of Continuing Care and contributes to the approval process of the resulting managed long-term care plans. The plans are submitted to SOFA's Long-Term Care Ombudsman, Legal and Legislative Unit, and Expanded In-home Services for the Elderly Program coordinator for review and comment. To guide the review process, a checklist has been developed that identifies what to look for when reviewing the plans.

Major contributors to this report were Andy Fischler and Michael Solomon.

We thank the State Office for the Aging management and staff for the courtesies they extended to us during his review.

Very truly yours,

William P. Challice
Audit Director

cc: Cynthia Marshall
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