

DEPARTMENT OF STATE FY2006 BUDGET TESTIMONY

The Honorable Regena L. Thomas

New Jersey Secretary of State

Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to come before you today.

It has been my great honor to serve as Secretary of State, and oversee one of the premier agencies of state government. During my time in office, I have sought to maximize the resources and efforts of the Department of State to advance our mission. During these difficult budgetary times, we have faced challenges and seized opportunities, and through our collective efforts helped to make New Jersey a better place for all people.

One of the most pressing challenges facing the Department of State in the coming year is the reduction of staff. In 2002, several divisions under my purview were hit disproportionately hard when the state streamlined the government workforce. As the state continued to address tough economical times, these vacancies were never filled. As a result, we have centralized services and consolidated programs where possible. We have done more with less. And, we have not compromised our mission. As you consider this year's budget, I ask that you keep in mind the serious impact any additional cuts will have upon our operations.

Over the past three years, the Department of State has accomplished many things: a dedicated source of funding for the state's arts, history and cultural programs; needed renovations to the State Museum; and new programs to improve records retention and preservation just to name a few. This year, we will continue to build upon these accomplishments and dedicate ourselves to achieving even greater success for the future.

With your permission, please allow me to share with you some of these highlights:

This year, the Division of Archives and Records Management launched the Public Records and Archives Infrastructure Support or PARIS Grants Program. Within five years, this \$28 million program will improve the supporting infrastructure of local records administration in all 21 counties and revolutionize the way New Jersey's counties and municipalities manage their records. The first round of PARIS grants will be awarded this May.

Another important milestone the Division of Archives and Records Management is spearheading is a cooperative project designed to reduce nearly 75 percent the State's costs for storing inactive government records. Together with Treasury's Division of Property Management and Construction, the Division of Archives and Records Management is working to save the state money through the termination of eight warehouse leases; the transfer and consolidation of records into efficiently managed facilities; the award of a less expensive commercial storage contract and the systematic disposal of obsolete records with expired retention periods.

Building on this success, the Division of Archives and Records Management and Treasury's Division of Revenue will together launch a strategic initiative to expand the state's capacity for centralized document imaging services, improve access to records and further reduce reliance on paper records storage.

I am also proud to announce that the State Archives received the top ranking among 400 applicants for the *Save America's Treasures* grant program. Under this federal program, the

Archives was awarded an unprecedented \$350,000 to conserve more than 5,200 pages of manuscripts documenting New Jersey's role in the military, political, and social struggle for American independence.

These are important accomplishments, and will continue to be our priorities in the year ahead as will our efforts to build upon the success of our arts, history and cultural programs.

With the creation of the dedicated source of funding, the state's arts, history and cultural programs have never been in a better position.

This year, the State Council on the Arts awarded over \$ 22.7 million in funding to support New Jersey's more than 700 arts organizations, programs, projects and co-sponsored initiatives. Additionally, the New Jersey Historical Commission provided grants totaling \$4 million to approximately 115 organizations and individuals throughout the state. More than just grant awards, these programs are a testament to the future of the arts and history in New Jersey.

I would personally like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the legislature and this administration for their leadership and support of the state's cultural programs. Today, tomorrow and for future generations to come, the arts and history of our great state will continue to revitalize our communities, improve our schools, create jobs, support our economy and enrich our lives.

Service is the cornerstone of the Department of State and its programs. From the Office of Faith Based Initiatives and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Commission to the Governor's Office of Volunteerism and the New Jersey Commission on National and Community Service, we are dedicated to helping...empowering...serving the people of New Jersey.

We are also committed to ensuring that all of the state's citizens have access to the opportunities within state government. To that end, the Department of State is overseeing a Disparity Study to collect current statistical data to identify the extent to which groups participate in procurement and construction practices.

Last year, two consultants Mason Tillman Associates and MGT of America were selected to conduct studies of the state's construction contracts and goods and services contracts respectively. With the state enacting a race and gender-neutral approach to set-aside programs, we have asked the consultants to extend the scope of the study to include an analysis of this data. Difficulties of some state agencies to provide the necessary data has slowed the study somewhat.

It is now expected that both these studies will be submitted to the Department on or before the end of this fiscal year. I look forward to receiving the consultants' reports and sharing the results of the studies with you. This Disparity Study is too important to rush. We owe it to the citizens and the state to do it right. This remains my top priority.

While each goal we set and each accomplishment we achieve contributes to the success of this Department, they also contribute to the success of the citizens and the State of New Jersey as well. I am proud to support the Governor's budget for fiscal year 2006 and I am proud to say that through the tremendous work of the Department of State we are helping to build a better New Jersey for all people. I would like to thank the members of this Committee for your support

and for helping us to continue to enrich the quality of life in the Garden State today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

As we look forward to the next fiscal year, our focus is clear -- to continue a tradition of excellence in service to the citizens of New Jersey. We have a great opportunity before us and I look forward to working with each of you to reward the faith that has been placed in us and fulfill the promise of our potential. I thank you for your time, and welcome any questions that you might have.