

The Public Authorities Reform Commission in 2006 noted that:

“...authorities have not been subject to the control or regulatory oversight and procedural checks and balances that apply to State and local government agencies....There is no single oversight and monitoring agency, a function performed by the Division of the Budget with respect to State agencies.”<sup>2</sup>

The Independent Authority Budget Office (ABO), which was created by the Public Authorities Act of 2005, collects a significant amount of financial and other information from authorities, and plays a vital role in fulfilling its statutory mandate of independent oversight of public authorities. Not to replace the role of the ABO, but rather to serve a different function, the Division of the Budget (DOB) should work to provide more visibility into authority operations in order to present an integrated view of State government. Only DOB, with a staff of approximately 300 and its statutory responsibility to report on the finances and operations of State agencies, has the ability to present an integrated view of agency and authority activities. Empowering DOB to review and report on the operations of these public authorities and their 4-year financial plans is essential to improve transparency about authorities and increase the overall efficiency of State government by presenting an integrated view of the activities of both State agencies and authorities, with a particular focus on overlapping programs and functions.

### **Increasing Transparency through Open New York**

In addition to using technology to expand the ability of citizens to conduct transactions with State agencies online, the Cuomo administration has also committed to using technology to make State government more transparent, accessible and accountable. The Governor’s CitizenConnects website has served as an “online town hall” to promote public engagement and provides access to schedules and public meeting information. The comprehensive Tappan Zee Bridge website provides access to all prior project reports along with up-to-date construction information that complements unprecedented in-person outreach, “TheNewNY.com” provides comprehensive and easy-to-navigate information on starting and maintaining a business in New York State, and the Regional Economic Development Council website makes public detailed information on economic development projects. The monthly Medicaid Redesign Team global spending report allows the public to track spending by sector and understand any deviations from targets.

In the 2013 State of the State address, Governor Cuomo announced the “Open New York” initiative to further expand the use of technology to improve government transparency and increase citizen access to statewide and agency-level data, reports, statistics, compilations and information. Under the Open New York initiative, data will be presented in a common, downloadable, easy-to-access format, and will be searchable and mappable.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.abo.ny.gov/commissionPublicAuth/FinalReport.pdf>

The Open New York web portal will allow researchers, citizens, business and the media direct access to high-value data, which will be continually added to and expanded, so these groups can use the data to innovate for the benefit of all New Yorkers. Budget data is now posted online in machine-readable and graphical formats, making access easier and more impactful for citizens and researchers alike. Providing detailed spending and budget information allows government employees and the public to locate inefficiencies and duplicate expenses. Putting government data online also reduces the expenses associated with producing paper documents in response to Freedom of Information Law (“FOIL”) requests.

A good example of the potential benefits from releasing non-confidential government data is the METRIX website created by the Department of Health in 2011. METRIX, which stands for Maximizing Essential Tools for Research Innovation and eXcellence, includes unique datasets that touch on all aspects of health care. While some of these datasets are limited in scope and permissible use, others have many new potential applications, and collectively represent an immense untapped resource for the improvement of public health. The METRIX site has also increased efficiency within DOH by substantially reducing the number of freedom of information law requests.

The State is also exploring ways to encourage developers to build software products or “apps” that leverage the value of these non-confidential data sets. This could be done in part through a program similar to NYC’s “Big Apps” competition. This competition judges apps that use city data to improve NYC and has led to the creation of dozens of useful apps that help citizens do everything from picking a restaurant to finding a parking space.