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## Memorandum of Support

### Update New York's Self-Sufficiency Standard to Assure that Social and Economic Policy is Based on Current Data

A.339 (Joyner)/S.5552 (Persaud)

Empire Justice Center supports this bill that would provide New York State with an updated self-sufficiency standard. The Self-Sufficiency Standard defines the amount of income necessary to meet basic needs (including taxes and tax credits) without public or private assistance, and provides information for 700 kinds of family configurations (number of adults, ages of children) based on their geographic location.

It was developed to provide a data driven tool that reflects a targeted analysis of a family's cost of meeting basic needs. The Official Poverty Measure (OPM), developed in the 1960's, and once a more commonly used tool, was based on the very limited measure of the cost of a food budget that meets minimal nutritional standards. The Self-Sufficiency Standard considers housing, utility and transportation costs, child care, taxes and tax credits, **as well as food costs**. Currently, 41 states and the District of Columbia, including New York State use the Self-Sufficiency Standard for evaluating and planning social and economic policy. New York City updated the standard for its five boroughs in 2018.<sup>1</sup> However, the Self-Sufficiency Standard for counties outside New York City has not been updated since 2010<sup>2</sup>, thereby disadvantaging residents and counties in the rest of state because policies and decisions are being based on outdated (and, therefore, inaccurate) data. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is equally critical to all the counties outside of New York City, so that policies and decisions are based on accurate and current data.

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<sup>1</sup> "Overlooked and Undercounted 2018: Defining Self – Sufficiency in New York City" Available at: [https://www.cityharvest.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NYC18\\_Brief1\\_102518LMa.pdf](https://www.cityharvest.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NYC18_Brief1_102518LMa.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <http://fiscalpolicy.org/the-self-sufficiency-standard-for-new-york>

This bill would require the Department of Labor to contract with a third party with at least 20 years' experience in calculating standards and budgets that accurately reflect the cost of meeting basic needs. For a modest investment of \$30,000,<sup>3</sup> the creator of the report would provide:

- A Microsoft Excel file containing individualized models for every county in the state;
- A written report explaining the New York specific data, modeling the effect of child support and work supports;
- Examples of the ways that the self-sufficiency standard has been used in 37 state to enhance opportunities for achieving self-sufficiency;
- A dashboard which allows users to look up their self-sufficiency standard data by county and family type. See <https://www.fbcmich.org/selfsufficiencystandard>

It is time that the remainder of the state has data that accurately reflects the cost of meeting basic needs so as to ensure that public dollars are spent meeting the goals set by New York State and its local jurisdictions. These counties and localities would benefit from a detailed state study of the CURRENT cost of meeting basic needs in their respective jurisdictions, thereby having an opportunity to use their limited public and private dollars more effectively. Empire Justice Center strongly supports this bill.

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May 24, 2019

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<sup>3</sup> New York State Self-Sufficiency Standard Project list (January, 2019) Diana Pearce, Director, Center for Women's Welfare, School of Social Work, University of Washington. On file at the Empire Justice Center.