Gov Launches Caregiver Initiative

In recognition of the recent National Family Caregivers Month, Gov. Kathy Hochul had urged state workers to complete a survey on their experiences balancing their jobs with caregiving tasks and encouraged private employers to do the same. Hochul hoped to raise awareness of unpaid working caregivers and the statewide resources available to help them.

“In addition to making historic investments to expand our long-term care workforce, I am excited to be giving back to the more than four million unpaid caregivers who have already dedicated their time and energy to caring for loved ones,” she said. “By recognizing this work as the valuable and crucial caregiving it is, individuals can better connect with the many state and local resources and supports specific to their needs.”

Recognizing the unique stresses on working caregivers, the State Office for the Aging and the State Department of Labor launched a project to survey state employees and gain insight on the impact of caregiving on the workplace. The initiative also promoted “Caregivers in the Workplace,” a 32-page guide providing information to help employers support working caregivers.

New York State has more than four million unpaid caregivers. These are family members, friends or neighbors who provide uncompensated care and support to someone else, such as a spouse, an older parent, children or someone with chronic or other medical conditions.

Unpaid caregivers perform a range of tasks for loved ones, such as accompanying them to medical appointments, providing help with bathing and dressing, shopping assistance and meal preparation, transportation, bill paying, household chores and more. Yet more than 50 percent of individuals in this role do not identify themselves as caregivers.

AARP estimates that the services provided by unpaid caregivers would cost roughly $32 billion annually.

New York has led a multi-strategy approach to assist family caregivers, through historic investments in the long-term care workforce, respite and social adult day care services offered through state and local offices for the aging, a landmark paid family leave program, paid sick leave laws and more.

Individuals needing support caring for an older adult or person with disabilities may contact the NY Connects helpline at 1-800-342-9871 or the NY Connects Resources Directory, a trusted resource for free, objective information about long term services and supports in New York State.

About one in six employees in the United States is a caregiver for a relative or friend. On average, these individuals spend more than 20 hours per week providing some form of care.

U.S. businesses lose as much as $33.6 billion annually in caregiver-related turnover, absenteeism, and loss of productivity, according to one estimate. This includes situations where caregivers have no choice but to arrive late or leave work early, make phone calls during work time, leave work to respond to emergencies, or miss work altogether.

Employees also have chosen to forgo promotions, have gone from full-time to part-time or leave work altogether to continue their caregiving work.

For individuals providing care to an older person and a child at the same time, 85 percent experienced mental health symptoms and 52 percent reported suicidal thoughts, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Other data from the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP found that 70 percent of working caregivers suffer work-related difficulties due to their dual roles; and 69 percent of caregivers reported having to rearrange their work schedule, decrease their hours or take unpaid leave in order to meet responsibilities.