

Government efficiency the focus

New panel meets for first time on streamlining bureaucracy

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ALBANY -- Quick: Can you make an acronym to combine NYSTA, DOT and NYSBA?

Some day you may have to. On Monday, members of the [SAGE Commission](#) (that's Spending and Government Efficiency) met for the first time to talk about streamlining state bureaucracy.

The board, created by Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) and co-led by his aide [Paul Francis](#) as well as Kodak CEO [Antonio Perez](#), introduced themselves, then listened as Francis and his deputy, [Derek Utter](#), outlined areas of consideration.

The commission will develop initial recommendations by mid-May. Cuomo called for the "rightsizing" of government during his gubernatorial campaign, and its report will form the basis for his efforts. Cuomo aides say the effort is the first comprehensive restructuring of state government since 1927.

Utter asked commission members to draft recommendations that "range from either some shared services along certain functions up to and including a potentially full consolidation" for the [New York State Thruway Authority](#), [Bridge Authority](#) and [Department of Transportation](#). Mergers among the entities have been on the lips of officials for years.

But Utter and Francis also asked members to look for efficiencies within other groups of agencies:

The [Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation](#); [Department of Environmental Conservation](#) and the [Department of State](#), which is charged with coastal management.

The Department of Health, Office of Mental Health, Office of Alcoholism and [Substance Abuse Services](#), Office for People with Developmental Disabilities and the Office for the Aging. Oversight agencies include the [Office of the Medicaid Inspector General](#) and the [Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for People with Disabilities](#).

Utter said the [Department of Economic Development](#) and [Empire State Development Corporation](#) are already "functional merged," but mentioned shifting a database of woman and minority-owned businesses to the [Office of General Services](#).

The Office of Children and Family Services and Office of Temporary and Disability Services. The two were combined until the 1990s as part of the Department of [Social Services](#). It was merged with the [Department of Family and Youth](#) to create OCFS.

"When we look at whether there are any reorganization opportunities in the various areas, we're trying to balance," he said. "There are some efficiencies that can be applied or some other form of cooperation, against the clear need to make sure that these vary distinct core missions are not resolved."

Sen. [Liz Krueger](#), a Manhattan Democrat who sits on the panel and before her election ran the [Community Food Resource Center](#), said social-service clients are often caught in an alphabet soup of varying government agencies.

"If you look from the bottom up as opposed to top down, you might come to a different answer," she said. "I actually don't think that separation has worked very well to accomplish that goal."

The Commission members include two labor leaders and former government officials as well as businessmen. They will also be advised by staffers from [McKinsey & Company](#), a private management consultancy.

The goal is to draft a reorganization plan by May 31. If they do so, the Legislature would commit to a vote within 30 days. In addition to tweaking agency functions, the commission is also looking at developing a way to measure government performance, including looking for "public-private partnerships" for some services.

"Where a consolidation has significant savings and-or significantly improved performance because of the need for greater integration, it makes sense. If we're just moving boxes around on an organizational chart, it doesn't make sense," said Francis. "One thing we always remind ourselves is, when you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. We're being careful of that."