



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **CIVIC GROUPS URGE STATE ACTION TO REFORM PUBLIC ETHICS Corruption Trials and Two Reform Reports Make the Case for Action Now**

In light of the corruption trials of two former legislative leaders taking place this week and New York State's D-minus grade in how it handles issues of integrity from a national comparison study, New York's leading good government groups today called upon the New York State legislature and governor to complete the job of reforming our laws governing public ethics. We urge them to embrace real solutions by enacting legislation that will bring about large scale change instead of incremental reform.

In a letter sent today to Governor Cuomo and the two legislative leaders, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan, the civic groups urged immediate action to enact comprehensive and significant solutions on the following matters of state ethics:

1. Reform legislative compensation through considering the forthcoming recommendations of the recently appointed New York State Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation, to address issues of salary, lulus, and outside income.
2. Limit the influence of dark money campaign contributions and end government spending that takes place in the shadows by closing the LLC loophole, requiring campaign contributors to disclose their employers, requiring disclosures of all lump-sum appropriation funds, and enacting much stronger restrictions on personal use of campaign funds.

3. Reform ethics oversight and enforcement by changing JCOPE's structure, scope, and voting procedures to boost public confidence in its actions. Changes should increase transparency of its operations, meetings and votes; expand jurisdiction to include all executive and legislative branch employees; and elevate the independence of the commissioners from their appointing authorities.
4. Strengthen financial reporting disclosure requirements for public officers to allow the public to more easily spot conflicts of interest.
5. Streamline and standardize disclosure of lobbying activity for better analysis and easier evaluation by the public.

That three significant developments regarding New York State's handling of ethics and corruption have converged together in the past ten days speaks once again to the pressing need for action:

1. The separate but concurrent corruption trails of former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, two of the three men in the room who helped craft much of the recent ethics laws;
2. A new national [report](#) out earlier this week, again showing New York's risk for corruption and dismal standing on public integrity with a grade of D-minus; and
3. Our own state's [ethics review commission](#) calling for a wide range of reforms in addition to the ones made by [JCOPE in its February 2015 report](#).

Additionally, the problem of Albany corruption again being addressed not by internal state watchdogs, but instead by the U.S. Attorney who this month is prosecuting charges against the two most recent former legislative leaders, demonstrates the clear need to strengthen our state's own ethics enforcement.

While two governors and the legislature have made some improvements to our ethics laws over the past ten years, the core problem of lawmakers using their public posts for private gain still persists. New Yorkers have lost faith in state government to make decisions without using the interest and influence of those who do business with the state.

The groups urge the governor and the state legislature to come together and enact legislation so public trust can be restored in New York's democratic institutions and political processes. The groups, also strong supporters of comprehensive campaign finance reform built around a core of public financing of elections, today focused on the urgent need for ethics reform as another essential way to address the problems created by a money culture in Albany. There is no shortage of real solutions that our leaders can draw upon in enacting comprehensive change, instead of incremental reform, and in doing so give hope to the public that can trust can be restored. In light of this storm of two trials and two reports, the groups call for immediate action on these widely-supported reforms, and in a special session if possible.

"The list of undone ethics reforms is long, and it is clearer than ever before that our elected leaders need to complete the job of ensuring that public officials can no longer use their public posts for private gain," said **Dick Dadey, Executive Director of Citizens Union**. "We need only look at the trials of former leaders Silver and Skelos to realize that our state has a long way to go to in responding to the crime wave of corruption - let alone the recent State Integrity Report that gave New York a D-minus for public integrity."

**John Kaehny, Executive Director of Reinvent Albany**, said: "So far there has is no sign that the arrests of the legislative leaders has changed how Albany does business. In particular, there are still billions of dollars in grants, business subsidies and state contracts which are dispensed essentially in secret. This is an invitation for more corruption. We need an online database of subsidy deals, grants and MOU funds which makes it clear who sponsored the funds and where those funds are going. "

"It is past time for the Governor and the Legislature to come together to address the corruption crisis in Albany which these recent events underscore," said **Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY**. "The public has moved from disapproval to anger and is demanding that our leaders step up and effect real change."

**Dare Thompson, President of the League of Women Voters of New York State**, said: "Corruption in state politics has been accepted as the norm for way too long. We need immediate action by our elected officials on ethics reform to fix this situation. New Yorkers need to have their faith restored in their state government."

**Blair Horner, Executive Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group**, said: "New Yorkers are fed up with Albany's scandals. They deserve action, not a head in the sand approach from their elected leaders. Governor Cuomo must call a special session devoted to ethics reform."