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CITIZENS UNION ISSUES 2nd REPORT ON TURNOVER IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE

*Crime Wave is Accelerating: Number of Legislators Who Left in the Past Six Years
Because of Ethical and Criminal Misconduct Has Tripled Over the Previous Six Years*

*One of Every Eleven Legislators Who Left Since 1999 Did So
Because of Ethical or Criminal Misconduct*

**Good Government Groups Call for Immediate Action
on Delayed Ethics Reform**

Citizens Union today released its second report in two years on turnover in the New York State Legislature, revealing an alarming trend of legislators leaving office due to ethical transgressions. During the past six years from 2005-2010, 13 legislators left office because of criminal charges or ethical misconduct - more than triple the 4 legislators who left during the previous six-year period from 1999-2004.

The report also showed that just over the past four years from 2007 – 2010, the pace of state legislators leaving office for such reasons doubled, as 9 legislators left during this four-year period, which is one more than the 8 legislators who left during the entire eight-year period before 2007 (1999 – 2006).

“This acceleration of criminal and ethical misconduct among our state’s elected officials over the past four years is alarming and needs strong corrective action,” said Dick Dadey, Executive Director at Citizens Union. “There are many good and decent state legislators with high ethical standards, but the rapidly growing number of elected officials who have left office because they violated the public trust is a big unaddressed problem. If there ever was a need to address this crime wave of misconduct, the time is now to enact meaningful ethics reform,” concluded Dadey.

Citizens Union’s report, which was written by Rachael Fauss, Policy and Research Manager at Citizens Union and Alex Camarda, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, was endorsed by the good government groups, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, Common Cause NY, League of Women Voters of New York State, and New York Public Interest Research Group.

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Citizens Union's report, which examined all the reasons why legislators left office from 1999 – 2010, identified 17 instances of legislators driven from office since 1999 because of ethical lapses or criminal conduct. One of every eleven legislators who left office did so because of illegal or unethical behavior.

The report discovered that the state legislature which took office in January 2011 contained 47 new faces from one that began two years earlier, the largest turnover seen in New York State during the 1999 – 2010 period, at 22 percent of all legislative seats, and possibly the largest since the 1974 Watergate-influenced election. The report also found that in spite of 13 legislators being defeated at the polls this past fall – a recent all time high - the incumbency re-election rate for state legislators still averaged 96% for the past twelve years. Interesting as well is that just 38, or 21 percent, of the 185 legislators who left office since 1999 did so because they lost a primary or general election that wasn't significantly influenced by accusations of ethical or criminal misconduct.

“The State Legislature has too many examples of corruption and misconduct that serve to diminish public confidence in government at a time when leadership and integrity is greatly needed to address the fiscal problems facing our State,” said Alex Camarda, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy. “The legislature must clean up its own house so the public has renewed faith that it can right the direction of our state's economy. Legislators must be beyond reproach to make the tough budgetary choices ahead.”

“Electoral defeat continues to be a minority reason why legislators ultimately leave office,” said Rachael Fauss, Policy and Research Manager at Citizens Union. “One would think in a democracy, electoral defeat would be the major reason for a change in representation in the legislature. Yet since 1999, more legislators have left their seats because of retirement or a private sector job than through losing a competitive election.”

To instill a more ethical and accountable culture in Albany, Citizens Union and its good government colleagues are calling for the immediate passage of ethics legislation that creates a strong mechanism for effective independent oversight and enforcement of ethics laws, ideally in the form of a unitary commission with joint jurisdiction over the executive and legislative branches of government and increased disclosure by legislators of outside income and business relationships.