



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ted O'Brien

Senator O'Brien, Senate Democrats continue to push for ethics reform

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ALBANY, N.Y. – Senator Ted O’Brien and members of the Senate Democratic Conference today introduced a package of ethics legislation to reform state government and combat the ongoing corruption issues facing New York State. Senator O’Brien’s bill included in the package would outlaw the use of campaign money for attorney’s fees or any costs for defending against criminal or civil prosecution for alleged violations of any state or federal law (S5094).

“Corrupt elected officials who are caught defrauding the public should not be allowed to add insult to injury by utilizing campaign war chests to pay their legal fees.” Senator O’Brien said. “That is why I have proposed legislation to ensure campaign funds can no longer be used to pay for any costs related to criminal or civil defense. Campaign accounts should be used to support candidates getting into office, not fund attempts to stay out of prison.”

Other bills included in the Senate Democrat’s package would address increase reporting requirements to the State Board of Elections, strengthen the regulations regarding the use of campaign money, and retroactively strip pension benefits from corrupt state officials.

“New Yorkers deserve a state government they can be proud of, and that requires decisive leadership to enact ethics reforms and clean up Albany,” Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said.

From the Senator's sponsor memo for S5094:

"Currently, New York's election law, allowing candidates to spend campaign funds for 'any lawful purpose,' is among the most lax in the nation. While spending campaign funds for personal use is technically prohibited, the lack of any definition for what constitutes a personal use renders the provision meaningless. This shortcoming in the law is striking when compared to the detailed restrictions issued by the Federal Election Commission.

Campaign donors have a reasonable expectation that their contributions will be used for the candidate's election efforts and the execution of his or her duties,. They do not expect their contributions to subsidize attorney's fees or litigation costs that have nothing to do with the nomination or election of the candidate to whom they made a donation. This legislation would therefore clarify that campaign funds may not be used for this purpose while preserving candidates' ability to use campaign funds for legal fees directly involved with nomination or election to office."

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Senator O'Brien represents the 55th district in the Senate, which is made up of the eastern half of Monroe County and the western half of Ontario County, including much of the city of Rochester.