



NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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Senate Majority To Pass Legislation to Improve State Ethics and Integrity

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority today will advance legislation that will strengthen ethics reforms in New York State. This package will modernize the process of appointing JCOPE members, update requirements in JCOPE Executive Director voting, remove partisan voting requirements for ethical investigations and findings of violations, and require JCOPE to develop anti-harassment training for registered lobbyists. These bills will also enact regulations on campaign funds and prevent campaign funds from being used for personal legal fees. In addition, this legislative package enacts a ban on “no rehire” clauses in settlement agreements, extends the statute of limitations on workplace harassment and discrimination claims, protects public and private employees under the Human Rights Law, and enacts the Let Survivors Speak Act.

“New Yorkers deserve a government that represents their best interests,” **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said. “As Senate Majority Leader, I have emphasized the need for meaningful reforms that will earn the public’s trust. I commend my colleagues for their dedication to doing so, and I am proud of the actions we are taking to bring needed improvements to JCOPE, prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, and ensure taxpayers aren’t footing the bill for an elected official’s legal issues. This legislation is crucial to preserving the integrity of our state government.”

The JCOPE legislation being passed by the Senate Majority, includes:

- **Omnibus JCOPE Reform:** This bill S.6964-A sponsored by Senator Alessandra Biaggi makes the following reforms to JCOPE:
 - **Updated JCOPE Member Appointments:** It will remove the partisan advantages built into the JCOPE appointment process whereby the majority of legislative appointees to JCOPE were given to the party in control of the chamber in 2011. Instead, the legislative leader of each conference will make two appointments.
 - **Voting Requirements for Investigations and Findings of Ethical Violations:** It will remove the requirement that legislators, state employees, and statewide officials can be investigated or found guilty of ethical violations by JCOPE only with the votes of at least two members of their own political party appointed by a particular official. Therefore, a vote of any eight members of the

commission will be sufficient to initiate an ethics investigation or make a finding of a violation.

- **Modifying Executive Director Voting:** It will remove the onerous voting requirements for appointing or removing an Executive Director for JCOPE and allow a simple majority of JCOPE members to vote in favor of appointing or removing an Executive Director.
- **Anti-Sexual Harassment Requirements for Lobbyists:** This bill, [S.1059A](#), sponsored by Senator John C. Liu, would require that JCOPE develop anti-sexual harassment training for registered lobbyists, and it will prohibit lobbyists who fail to complete the training from engaging in state lobbying. This training will add to other sexual harassment prevention policies to ensure that employees of lobbyists, clients, legislators and legislative employees are all better protected.

The ethics reform legislation being passed by the Senate Majority, includes:

- **Protecting Taxpayer Reimbursements:** This bill, [S.164](#), sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris, would prohibit taxpayer reimbursement of campaign or legal defense funds in an effort to prevent the use of such funds being used by public figures to pay off personal legal fees.

The anti-harassment legislation being passed by the Senate Majority, includes:

- **“No Rehire” Ban:** This bill [S.766](#) sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes will ban "no rehire" clauses in settlement agreements for employees or independent contractors that have filed a claim against their employer.
- **Extended Statute of Limitations for Harassment:** This bill [S.849](#) Sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes will extend the statute of limitations for employment discrimination, including sexual harassment, from three years to six years
- **Extending Time Frame for Reporting Complaints:** This bill, [S.566A](#), sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman, would raise the statute of limitations to three years for all unlawful discriminatory complaints to be brought to the Division of Human Rights, recognizing that victims need sufficient time to come forward.
- **Extending Human Rights to All Employees:** This bill, [S.3395A](#), sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes, would clarify who is to be considered an employee of public employers covered under the anti-discrimination provisions laid out by the Human Rights Law . Previous interpretations of “employer” excluded the personal staff of elected officials and judges. This bill would rectify that.
- **Let Survivors Speak Act:** This bill, [S.738](#), sponsored by Senator Alessandra Biaggi, would reform current Non-Disclosure Agreement laws that financially penalize survivors who speak out about their abuse by prohibiting settlements that require plaintiffs to pay liquidated damages for violating their NDA.

Bill Sponsor, and Chair of the Senate Committee on Ethics and Internal Governance, Senator Alessandra Biaggi said, “New Yorkers deserve a government that works for everyone — not just those in powerful positions. But without meaningful transparency and accountability, New York State will never end the cycle of corruption and abuse that has long plagued Albany.

Since its creation, JCOPE has fallen short of its responsibility to ensure the integrity of our government. This legislation takes several key steps to improve the functioning of JCOPE and advance the goals of ethics and accountability in Albany. I am proud to sponsor this bill and I thank Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins for prioritizing this issue.”

Bill Sponsor, Senate Majority Deputy Leader, Senator Michael Gianaris said, “Since taking the majority, our State Senate has prioritized good government and ethics reforms, and this legislative package continues that effort. I am proud the bills we’re passing include my proposal to ensure tax dollars are not used to reimburse politicians accused of crimes when their campaign accounts or legal defense funds pay for their criminal defense. I look forward to closing this outrageous loophole and am pleased to join my colleagues in improving integrity in state government.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Andrew Gounardes, said “All workers deserve a safe, positive, and dignified experience in their workplace, and the reforms needed to ensure these rights is an issue I’ve long fought to address. Victims of harassment who fear losing their job or being penalized for coming forward will now have increased protections and a wider avenue of recourse for discrimination they’ve experienced. I’ve also worked tirelessly to advance legislation that extends coverage under anti-discrimination provisions laid out by the Human Rights Law, and demonstrates that no individual or institution — no matter how powerful — is above the law. It’s our responsibility to listen to those who wish to speak up, and to amplify their voices to ensure that our government ethics are held to the highest standard. I’m proud of the reforms laid out in these bills, and I look forward to seeing them put into action.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Brad Hoylman, said, “New York’s Human Rights Law provides a powerful protection against discrimination and harassment, but its arbitrarily short statute of limitations for filing administrative complaints often benefit those who are discriminating and harassing. My legislation (S.566A) to extend the statute of limitations for filing complaints with the Division of Human Rights from one to three years will give victims more time to come forward. I’m grateful for Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins’ continuing commitment to centering victims’ rights and strengthening ethics laws in Albany.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator John C. Liu said, “As a condition of registration, S1059A will require lobbyists to complete an annual anti-sexual harassment training as a condition of their registration. Lobbyists are frequently in close proximity to government officials and staff, and the sad reality is that lobbyists have both perpetrated sexual harassment and been subject to it. Regular training will ensure lobbyists fully comprehend the laws and policies that help prevent sexual harassment, and help make the entire government ecosystem is a safer place for workers.”

Senator Jim Gaughran said, “Government must operate in the best interests of taxpayers and these bills make important reforms to strengthen New York’s ethics laws. The anti-harassment legislation will enact vital protections for employees to ensure all New Yorkers have a workplace free from sexual harassment and retaliation.”

Senator Pete Harckham said, “There can be no room in public service for unethical behavior or workplace harassment. These new bills will help New York continue to move toward higher ground in terms of a responsible and just governance that our residents truly deserve.”

Senator Robert Jackson said, “Ethics and integrity should be at the heart of government, but they haven’t always been at the heart of Albany. I came to the State Senate in 2018 with a wave of legislators who were elected in part for our commitment to changing Albany’s past culture of corruption, and I’m proud to be a part of the solution today. Building an ethical culture in state government requires focus on transparency and on enforcement, and this legislative package moves the needle on both. The people of New York State deserve an honest government that works for them, and that’s what we’re committed to delivering.”

Senator Liz Krueger said, “It is critical to the survival of democracy that the people trust their elected officials to act in the best interests of the state, and not engage in self-dealing or corruption. For too long New Yorkers have been forced to cynically accept the status quo that accountability is a rare phenomenon in Albany. The legislation we pass today would make significant headway in tightening ethics oversight while we consider the best way to enact the fundamental long-term reform that we ultimately need.”

Senator Rachel May said, “Today’s package of legislation addresses many of the issues with JCOPE that we continue to face. In order for this body to be effective, it must be both independent and functional, two attributes that have been lacking for far too long. I am proud to vote for these bills that will reduce the partisan influence over appointments to the commission and increase their ability to act as true independent oversight.”

Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, “I’m proud to join my colleagues in passing this important legislation. It’s imperative that we increase New York’s government ethics requirements. By removing partisan advantages from JCOPE and modifying voting requirements, we are opening the door for greater transparency at the state level. We are increasing worker protections against harassment by expanding protections to include public employees, increasing the amount of time victims have to share their stories and removing the financial barriers of coming forward. These changes will close loopholes that perpetuate abusive and illegal behavior.”

Senator Reichlin-Melnick said, “I’m proud to support these common sense reforms to JCOPE and ethics rules in state government that will protect victims, taxpayers, and employees from abusive practices of elected officials. As elected representatives, we must lead by example to continue making the workplace a more inclusive environment where harassment is not tolerated, and abusers are held to account for their actions.”

Senator Sean Ryan said, “Government officials need the public’s trust in order to do their jobs effectively, so it’s crucial that we hold our public officials to the highest possible ethical standards. Removing partisan impediments to JCOPE’s operation in high-profile investigations will help ensure that they remain above reproach and are able to take appropriate measures to hold any official who breaks the law accountable. Today we have also passed several meaningful survivors’ rights reforms, which empower workers to report harassment or discrimination

without fear of reprisal from their employers. These changes further our ongoing commitment to combating harassment of all types in the workplace.”

Senator Julia Salazar said, “New Yorkers deserve a government that they can trust. This legislative package levels the playing field and takes steps to ensure that the people of New York are represented by a legislature that prioritizes integrity. In addition to the very necessary JCOPE and ethics reforms that need to occur, it is also important to acknowledge the need for us to protect survivors by passing legislation that allows for their voices to be heard without retaliation. Extending the time frame for reporting complaints, and the statute of limitations for harassment is an important and crucial part of the survivor-centered approach we must take to as we continue to fight against any form of harassment in the workplace.”

Senator James Sanders Jr. said, “We must be ever vigilant in maintaining the integrity of government officials and those who lobby them. This package of ethics and integrity reform legislation helps protect the public and strengthens democratic principles and fairness.”

Senator James Skoufis said, “Those in positions of authority shouldn't be able to play fast and loose with the public's trust. This new slate of legislation -- from protecting and advancing the human rights of state employees, to reforming the operations of JCOPE, to cracking down on misuse of campaign funds -- should signal to all New Yorkers that my majority colleagues and I are fully committed to making state government more fair, transparent, and representative.”

Senator Toby Ann Stavisky said, “Ethics reforms are essential to the integrity of our state government. New Yorkers have to be able to trust the people they have elected to office as well as those who have been appointed to serve. This legislative package supports victims of harassment, both in and outside of the workplace. I want to thank Senator Stewart Cousins, Senator Biaggi and my colleagues in the Democratic Majority for advancing this legislation.”

Senator Kevin Thomas said, “Strong ethics laws protect public confidence and ensure accountability in government. I am proud to support this package of reforms, which will improve transparency, strengthen integrity, and ensure that workers across New York State are better protected.”

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