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THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



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February 15, 2017

Commissioner Roberta Reardon
New York State Department of Labor
W Averell Harriman State Office
Campus Building 12
Albany, NY 12240

Dear Commissioner Reardon,

We write to you today in our capacities as State Senators to bring your attention to a matter that we find troubling. As the head of the state's labor enforcement and administration, we believe it is a situation that requires your attention.

Several weeks ago, we met with supporters the Summer Youth Employment program. These individuals participated in the program and found it beneficial. They also advocated for its continuation. It was an honor to meet with them and we both admired their passion as well as the merits of the program. As you know, the state secured \$30 million in funding – with an additional \$20 million in state tax incentives for businesses – to help young New Yorkers gain new skills to improve academic performance and increase future job prospects.

Our issue relates to their employment opportunities. Several of these individuals discussed jobs where they went door-to-door in the Bronx to register voters.

First, we question how this type of activity correlates with academic improvement or future employment. We would argue that in order to prepare our workforce for the 21st century global economy, we should focus on developing more pertinent skills than walking neighborhoods or standing on street corners.

Second, and far more troubling for us, pertains to the political nature of this work. New Yorkers expect the state to use their tax dollars responsibly. Taxpayer funded political operations run against the public's expectation that New York State utilizes tax dollars responsibly. Blending public funds with political activity also appears to conflict with numerous laws. Supporting voter registration drives in urban areas would almost invariably benefit one political party over another.

Would you be able to provide details related to the number of summer youth that participated in these types of activities, where they took place, and approximately how much state funding these

employees received? In addition, we ask that New York State cease similar activities moving forward. We believe it is critical to maintain the integrity of the Summer Youth Employment program. It is also essential to ensure prudent use of taxpayer monies. Finally, New York State should make every attempt to avoid slipping into the volatile and politicized national discussions regarding voting rights, voter suppression, and voter fraud.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Robert G. Ort in black ink.

Robert G. Ort
Senator, 62nd District

Handwritten signature of Thomas D. Croci in black ink.

Thomas D. Croci
Senator, 3rd District