

March 17, 2022



OUR ORGANIZATIONS URGE YOU TO REJECT BOTH THE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY ONE-HOUSE PROPOSALS THAT KEEP THE STATUS QUO ON ETHICS

To The Members of the General Conference Committee, as well as the General Government and Public Protection Budget Subcommittees:

On behalf of our groups, we write to urge that you reject both the Senate's and Assembly's budget plans regarding the Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) (see S.8000B/A.9000B). **We simply cannot make this clear enough: A vote to continue funding JCOPE without reform is a vote for the state's failed ethics status quo.**

JCOPE has been a failure since it was first created – a failure that stemmed from its lack of political independence. Governor Hochul has made it clear that she wants to eliminate JCOPE. There has been widespread criticism of the agency and *no one* has urged that it be continued.

Governor Hochul advanced an ethics reform plan in her budget that – while [in need of further strengthening](#) – is an improvement over the disastrous status quo. Yet, neither the Senate nor the Assembly have advanced a reform plan. Instead, both one-house budgets simply continue to fund the existing failed institution, with the Senate acknowledging the funding could be for JCOPE *or* its successor. There have been some arguments that changes can be done outside of the budget, but that simply does not make sense.

Acting to replace a state agency makes the *most* sense when in the process of deciding on a budget. Further, an improved ethics oversight entity should be given additional resources beyond the \$5.6 million provided for JCOPE in the budget.

The lack of meaningfully independent oversight creates a high risk for corruption – and that's what New York has gotten, from the Buffalo billions bid rigging scandal to the self-dealing of Sheldon Silver and Dean Skelos. No one defends the current situation, but inaction by the Legislature to achieve change is an implicit defense of New York's lousy ethics status quo.

In fact, reform proposals have been advanced. The governor has reform in her budget, State Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Carroll have advanced constitutional change, and others have advocated reforms, but nothing is included in the one-house budget plans.

We urge you to demand that the two-house budget plan include ethics reform.