



August 24, 2023

Senator James Skoufis  
Chair, Committee on Investigations and  
Government Operations

Assemblymember John T. McDonald III  
Chair, Committee on Governmental  
Operations

Senator Neil Breslin  
Chair, Committees on Ethics and Internal  
Governance and Insurance

Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon  
Chair, Committee on Ethics and Guidance

**Re: Please hold a hearing on NYS ethics oversight, including implementation of new ethics laws and alternative, more independent commission structures**

Dear Senators Skoufis and Breslin, and Assemblymembers McDonald and Simon:

It has been more than a year since the Legislature approved and the Governor signed 2022 budget legislation replacing the discredited Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) with the Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government (COELIG). We ask that your committees hold a hearing this fall to evaluate the effectiveness of the law, how COELIG is working so far, and legislative and constitutional changes needed to improve ethics oversight and public confidence in state government.

Our groups [opposed the creation of COELIG](#) because we felt that it fell far short of a truly independent ethics commission: Its membership is appointed by the very people it is supposed to oversee. While we are hopeful that COELIG will be an improvement over JCOPE, we continue to believe that the Legislative Ethics Commission should be abolished, and that a unified, independent state ethics commission be established. We have [offered recommendations](#) on how a new ethics commission could be structured.

The Legislature should also consider the possibility that former Governor Cuomo's litigation against COELIG could result in the agency being gutted or thrown out, and be prepared to act

should this occur. New Yorkers should be assured that there will be an effective ethics enforcement body in place, rather than an extended period of limbo – particularly given that a new ethics body was just created.

In order to prepare for that outcome, as well as to contemplate legislative changes and funding needed for the FY 2024-2025 state budget, we ask your committees to hold an oversight hearing prior to the beginning of the 2024 session. We recommend that the hearing consider the following:

1. Constitutional and statutory changes needed to create a more independent ethics commission.
2. Implementation of the 2022 law creating COELIG, and actions by the commissioners and staff to enforce the state’s ethics and lobbying laws.
3. Whether COELIG investigators are properly trained to handle cases related to harassment and discrimination.
4. COELIG’s forthcoming 2022 annual report and its legislative recommendations, as well as additional legislative recommendations from the public.
5. COELIG’s funding needs ahead of the FY 2024-2025 state budget, particularly with regard to staffing levels and IT needs for training requirements and improvements to its lobbying and financial disclosure databases.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Kaehny  
Executive Director  
Reinvent Albany

Laura Ladd Bierman  
Executive Director  
League of Women Voters of NYS

Blair Horner  
Executive Director  
NYPIRG

Elizabeth Kocienda  
Director of Advocacy  
NYC Bar Association

Betsy Gotbaum  
Executive Director  
Citizens Union

Erica Vladimer  
Co-Founder  
Sexual Harassment Working Group

Evan Davis  
Manager  
Committee to Reform the State Constitution