



December 11, 2025

Commissioners
NYS Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government

Re: Sexual Harassment by Public Officials is an Unethical Abuse of Power; COELIG's Legislative Agenda Must Not Go Backwards

Dear Commissioners,

We strongly urge you to include codifying penalties for violations of Public Officers Law § 74(3)(f) and (h), and explicitly codifying that harassment and discrimination violate the state's code of ethics – similar to what you proposed in item number 8 of your draft agenda – in your final 2026 legislative agenda.

We understand that you plan to finalize your 2026 legislative agenda at your December 17, 2025 meeting next week. Based on your [November 19, 2025 Commission meeting](#), we are concerned that your not including this in the agenda would backslide on the work in this area done by your predecessors at the Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE). To its credit, JCOPE concluded that sexual harassment is an ethical violation after conducting a number of investigations, including [of Brooklyn Democratic Party boss Assemblymember Vito Lopez](#), that underlined the dramatic power imbalance between powerful elected officials and much less powerful staffers.

Regarding specific legislation, our groups [support S4197 \(Gounardes\)/A6201 \(Kelles\)](#), a bill that would prohibit both harassment and discrimination under the state code of ethics. Because the law is silent on this issue, state officials accused of harassment can exploit this gap to try to dismiss complaints filed with COELIG. We also believe that limiting it to sexual harassment will make it harder for those who come forward to seek justice, especially women of color who experience both sexual harassment and racial discrimination.

Beyond clarifying the law, we support the recommendation made by Commissioner and Vice Chair Ava Ayers at the November 19, 2025 meeting that regulations be considered to clarify the standards and process used for handling complaints or investigations that involve harassment.

We urge COELIG to issue regulations in this area that are open to public comment so that the Commission's standards are as clear as possible while statutory changes are sought.

More broadly, we believe COELIG needs to step up and meet the needs of the moment with a much stronger roster of legislative proposals. It would be counterproductive to ask the Legislature for less in 2026 than in 2025. Given the endless scandals that have wracked Albany, it's not surprising that about [two-thirds of New Yorkers think](#) the state's political system is "not healthy" and state leaders are not dealing with the things most important to them.

Our groups recommended a number of truly modest proposals at your [September 25, 2025 hearing](#), and some were discussed in the staff [Comprehensive Review](#). Unfortunately, you did not include any of our recommendations in your proposed legislative agenda, opting to, instead, repeat your 2025 agenda. There are many new laws and rules COELIG could be working on, including the three below that we previously put before you. If you do not want to pursue these, we urge you to propose additional items that expand on your experience as an ethics commission and meet the current moment.

- Lobbyists should report campaign contributions to COELIG;
- There should be reporting of lobbying on senate confirmations; and
- Lobbying reports should show whether lobbying was conducted in support or opposition to the legislation or other governmental action.

Be bold, ask for more. New York needs you.

Sincerely,

Rachael Fauss, Senior Policy Advisor, Reinvent Albany

Erica Vladimer, Founding Director, Harassment-Free New York

Grace Rauh, Executive Director, Citizens Union

Evan Davis, Manager, Committee to Reform the State Constitution

Susan Lerner, Executive Director, Common Cause New York

Erica Smitka, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of New York State

Cc. Sanford Berland, Executive Director
Emily DeSantis, Chief of Staff and Director of External Affairs