

BRENNAN CENTER  
FOR JUSTICE

at New York University School of Law



## **Good Government Groups Call for Ethics and Rules Changes as Assembly Picks New Speaker**

*Urge Lawmakers to Seize Opportunity to Restore Public's Faith in State  
Government*

### **Contact:**

DeNora Getachew, Brennan Center for Justice, 917-912-5471

Dick Dadey, Citizens Union, 917-709-2896

Susan Lerner, Common Cause/NY, 917-670-5670

Barbara Bartoletti, League of Women Voters, 518-469-8905

Blair Horner, NYPIRG, 518-727-4506

**ALBANY, NY** (02/02/2015) - Today, representatives of New York's leading good government watchdog groups, the Brennan Center for Justice, Citizens Union, Common Cause/NY, the League of Women Voters and NYPIRG, responding to the disappointing process on display this past week leading to the selection of a new Assembly Speaker, urged the members of the Assembly to use this historic opportunity to pass long-overdue reforms that would transform how it conducts business.

The groups released a letter, also signed by Reinvent Albany, which was sent to all members of the Assembly last week. In it, they outlined reforms needed to ensure that all members, including the rank and file, have the opportunity to provide meaningful representation to their constituents in an effectively functioning, transparent legislature. Such changes are needed to assure New Yorkers that the Assembly is serious about eliminating corruption. A copy of the letter is attached.

Specifically, the groups call on Assembly members to demand the following:

### Comprehensive Ethics Reform

- Review and overhaul legislative ethics oversight;
- Complete transparency in disclosure of outside business clients for all lawmakers;
- Stricter oversight of lobbyists; and,
- Comprehensive changes to the campaign finance system including: closing the LLC loophole, lower contribution limits, strict controls over "personal use" of campaign contributions, and creation of a voluntary system of public financing of elections.

### Changes to Legislative Procedures

- Increase the strength and efficiency of committees, so that they function fully and effectively; Provide greater opportunity for rank and file members to bring legislation with majority support to the floor, even over the objection of leadership;
- Institute more equitable allocation of resources between all members; and

- Increase transparency in the chamber that include webcasting all meetings to the public.

The groups indicated their eagerness to work with Assembly Members and the new Assembly leadership to help achieve these reforms.

“As Winston Churchill said, ‘Never let a good crisis go to waste,’” said **Susan Lerner**, Executive Director of **Common Cause/NY**. “This is the Assembly’s opportunity to show New Yorkers that its change in leadership heralds a change in how the people’s business is conducted. Adopting the common sense reforms we detail today will not only improve the way the Assembly functions, but would also improve its standing with the public.”

**Dick Dadey**, Executive Director of **Citizens Union** said, “The events of the past week forcefully demonstrate once again that Albany operates within a culture of secrecy and backroom deals. The Assembly should seize this moment to change the culture by revising rules to promote democratic functioning of the house, and enacting desperately needed ethics reforms.”

"New York State must move from being the nation's ethics laughingstock, to ethics leader. The Assembly can lead the way by embracing rules changes that will make it open, fair, and publicly accountable. The Senate should follow. And then the governor and Legislature must roll up their sleeves to develop comprehensive and meaningful ethics reforms," said **Blair Horner**, **NYPIRG** Legislative Director.

“After years of power being consolidated in the hands of the Speaker, Albany has the chance to forge a more democratic and transparent path. New leadership must give rank and file members of the Assembly, and New York voters, a greater voice through new rules for the chamber. Then they must work together to restore the public's faith. That means mandating greater disclosure of legislators’ outside income and fighting for comprehensive campaign finance reform, including a statewide public financing system to empower average New Yorkers,” said **DeNora Getachew**, Campaign Manager and Legislative Counsel at the **Brennan Center for Justice**.

“The events of the past two weeks have given the Assembly the unique opportunity to bring needed reforms to the legislative process. Legislators should have access to equal resources for staff. Rules reform should require hearings on all legislation prior to action on the floor and require inclusion of fiscal impact statements when appropriate. Disclosure of outside income and improve enforcement of current ethics laws is imperative to restore the public trust in our legislature,” said **Barbara Bartoletti**, **League of Women Voters NYS** Legislative Director.

####