

TOP 10 ETHICS REFORMS

2007 is the 20th anniversary of New York's ethics law. Given the recent controversies and scandals, it is clear that the law needs to be strengthened. We urge you to enact the following reforms:

Recommendation #1: Create an Independent Ethics Commission.

We urge you to abandon New York's bifurcated system of ethics enforcement and create an independent ethics commission with jurisdiction to monitor and enforce New York's ethics laws in both the executive and legislative branches.

Recommendation #2: End "Pay to Play."

We urge you to implement pay-to-play restrictions. The infusion of large sums of money by businesses and unions with public contracts and lobbyists into the campaign coffers of elected representatives has generated a widespread public belief that contributors are "paying" those officials for the opportunity to "play" with the government.

Recommendation #3: Strengthen New York's gift ban.

Gifts to elected officials, state officers or employees, and candidates for those offices, with limited exceptions for *de minimis* items, should be banned.

Recommendation #4: Ban honoraria.

We urge you to ban honoraria paid to public officials, except those paid for private professional services at the rate generally charged by specialists in the relevant field. Current New York law does not prohibit honoraria in any form for state legislators, and it only requires that such payments be disclosed if their value exceeds \$1000.

Recommendation #5: Restrict the personal use of campaign contributions.

Restrictions on the personal use of campaign funds must be strengthened and enforced. In recent years, reports of politicians using their campaign funds to cover arguably personal expenses have exposed a serious inadequacy of current legal restrictions on such behavior.

Recommendation #6: Strengthen the "revolving door" ban.

We encourage you to strengthen the state's "revolving door" ban by extending it to political party officials and lengthening the period of prohibition for lobbying by legislative employees. Bans on "revolving door" lobbying seek to restrain former state government and party officials from using their government connections to benefit themselves, their clients or their business interests after they leave office.

Recommendation #7. Create more stringent requirements for financial disclosure for public officers.

Financial disclosure requirements for state employees must be strengthened. Requiring disclosure helps to ensure the transparency and accountability of state government and to avoid possible conflicts of interest.

Recommendation #8. Require ethics training for lobbyists and for the governor, legislators, legislative employees, state agency officers, and state agency employees.

A reform package should expressly require ethics training for all state officials, including the governor, and legislators, as well as continuing education in these areas provided by the state ethics commission.

Recommendation #9: Strengthen accountability of "member items" and other lump sum appropriations.

We urge you to require greater accountability in "member item" spending. Some of the most recent scandals have resulted from misuse of "member item" spending. Any ethics reform package should address such abuses.

Recommendation #10. Strengthen ethical standards for public officials.

We recommend that a new ethics law prohibits business relationships between public officials and lobbyists and those who receive government contracts. Moreover, a new law must make it clear that public officials cannot use public employees in order to provide personal services.