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**CITIZENS UNION CALLS
FOR STRONG AND FULL DISCLOSURE OF FUNDERS
TO ORGANIZATIONS THAT LOBBY
IN TESTIMONY BEFORE
THE JOINT COMMISSION ON PUBLIC ETHICS (JCOPE)**

[Citizens Union](#) testified today before the [Joint Commission on Public Ethics \(JCOPE\)](#), calling on the state's ethics body to promulgate rules that will robustly disclose donors to lobbyists and clients.

“The Public Integrity Reform Act of 2011 broke new ground by requiring that sources of income to organizations that lobby city and state government are disclosed,” said Dick Dadey, Executive Director of Citizens Union. “It is important that JCOPE issue rules that ensure the spirit of the required and desired transparency in the law is fully realized. Public confidence in government and our elected officials’ actions requires frequent disclosure and robust transparency about the intersection of not just money and political campaigns, but also money and policy formation. Therefore, we urge JCOPE to promulgate rules that err on the side of including more information about who contributes, not less.”

The testimony was delivered in the wake of press coverage of the relationship between the Cuomo administration and the Committee to Save New York, a 501(c)(4) lobbying organization that has spent significant funds on advertisements in support of the Governor’s agenda, further highlighting the need for robust disclosure of donors to organizations who lobby.

Citizens Union highlighted in its [testimony](#) delivered by Alex Camarda, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, four of its twelve [recommendations](#) it provided in commentary in May to JCOPE, as was [requested by the Commission](#).

The recommendations provided by Citizens Union included that JCOPE should go beyond the basic receipt of names of donors and additionally seek to include more identifying information such as donor’s employers and their addresses so that contributors with common names could be distinguished from each other. Citizens Union also called on JCOPE to ensure in its rulemaking that different, related contributing entities and individuals be reported as a single source.


“Limited liability partnerships and corporations, or individuals in the same family could evade disclosure by giving multiple contributions to lobbying organizations that are below the \$5,000

threshold for disclosure when in fact their total donations are above it,” said Camarda. “Connected entities or individuals should be treated as one contributor.”

Citizens Union also noted that the current law already contains many actual and potential exemptions to disclosure by donors to lobbying organizations, including entire issue areas related to civil rights and civil liberties. Individual donors can also seek exemptions before their contributions are known and appeal unfavorable decisions by JCOPE regarding disclosure to an independent judge.

Given Citizens Union’s concerns regarding the current exemptions to disclosure, it recommended that JCOPE only sparingly exempt any additional issue areas beyond civil liberties, and only after meeting certain conditions. Citizens Union called for proof of recently documented cases of harassment, threats, harm or reprisals to be provided by donors or advocates in an issue area before an exemption is granted, and that any exemptions be temporary and subject to review before renewal.

While Citizens Union largely made recommendations to increase transparency, it also argued that basic fairness requires that rules go into effect prospectively rather than retroactively. This will ensure that lobbyists, clients and donors know the rules of the road before contributions are made for lobbying rather than organizations having to report contributions that occurred before the rules are promulgated.



[Citizens Union](#) is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. Citizens Union serves as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform. We work to ensure fair and open elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public.

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