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Citizens Union Files JCOPE Complaint Regarding Assembly Handling of Lopez Sexual Harassment Charges and Settlement

**Good Government Group Calls for Investigations to Determine Facts and Whether Public Officers Law
was Violated**

[Citizens Union](#) today sent a [letter](#) to the Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) calling upon it to commence two investigations regarding the sexual harassment allegations against Assemblymember Vito Lopez: the first concerning how the State Assembly and Speaker Sheldon Silver handled the investigation and settlements related to Assemblymember Lopez's misconduct, and the second concerning Lopez's alleged sexual harassment of members of his staff as it relates to his duties as a public officer.

With New Yorkers' trust and confidence in our state government again shaken and new details emerging each day, JCOPE's investigation must determine whether Lopez's actions violated the public trust standard in the state Public Officers Law. It must also examine how the Assembly and Speaker Silver handled the charges against Lopez to assess the underlying circumstances of these matters, determine what procedures were followed, evaluate the actions taken, and examine possible additional violations of the Public Officers Law.

The letter from Dick Dadey, Citizens Union's executive director, outlined several issues the good government organization felt needed examination. "In asking for these investigations, there must be no rush to judgment, but it is necessary that the new independent state ethics watchdog, JCOPE, provide to the public the full facts and circumstances of how the State Assembly and Speaker Silver handled these matters. It is troubling that the first Lopez matter was dealt with secretly, without the knowledge of the Assembly Ethics and Guidance Committee or disclosure to the public." said Dadey regarding the release of the letter. "We also want to know whether the Assembly Speaker's handling of the matter may have violated the Public Officers Law and what level of involvement the offices of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and Comptroller Tom DiNapoli had in the Lopez settlement. Our elected officials need to be held accountable for their actions, which is why these investigations are needed so that the public can have full trust in its government."

Citizens Union also called for JCOPE to establish greater clarity regarding proper procedures for


handling charges of sexual harassment and under which circumstances the Ethics and Guidance Committee of the Assembly or Senate should notify JCOPE when it investigates complaints of sexual harassment that may also be a violation of the Public Officers Law.

"This investigation presents JCOPE in its young existence with an opportunity to assert its oversight authority over charges of ethical misconduct of state legislators. It is important that there be no rush to judgment, but it is necessary that this matter be investigated and resolved thoroughly, fairly, publicly, and expeditiously by an outside independent entity as the public deserves to know what happened and why," concluded Dadey.

Citizens Union has also sent a [letter](#) to the Assembly requesting that it make available to the public materials surrounding the settlement that do not compromise the privacy of the victims, as well as making known the role and procedures of the Ethics and Guidance Committee.

[The complaint to JCOPE can be read in its entirety here.](#)

[The letter to the Assembly can be read in its entirety here.](#)



[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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