

BRENNAN CENTER  
FOR JUSTICE at New York University School of Law



Reinvent  
Albany

## NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release:**  
Tuesday, March 8, 2016

**Contact:**

DeNora Getachew, Brennan Center for Justice, 646-292-8357  
Citizens Union, Dick Dadey, 917-709-2896  
Common Cause, Susan Lerner, 917-670-5670  
League of Women Voters of NYS, Barbara Bartoletti, 518-469-8905  
NYPIRG, Blair Horner, 518-727-4506  
Reinvent Albany, John Kaehny, 917-941-9865

### **REFORMERS CALL ON GOVERNOR, LEGISLATIVE LEADERS TO HOLD PUBLIC LEADERS' MEETINGS TO OPENLY ADDRESS STATE ETHICS REFORM**

*Negotiations around Laws and Rules Governing Ethical Conduct of Officials  
Must Be Conducted in Public View*

**(Albany, NY)** In a letter delivered today, a coalition of government reform organizations called on Governor Andrew Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and the other legislative leaders to hold a series of open public leaders' meetings to discuss and negotiate – in public – ethics reforms necessary to restore New Yorkers' battered confidence in Albany.

With a recent poll showing that nearly 90% of New Yorkers believe that unethical behavior is a serious problem in state government a month before former legislative leaders Sheldon Silver and Dean Skelos are sentenced for public corruption, the governor and legislative leaders have an obligation to New Yorkers to reach a significant agreement on ethics reform.

We believe that in order for the agreement to be sufficiently consequential as to change the culture of how business is done in Albany and lessen the occurrence of corruption, it must be discussed and negotiated in the full view of the public.

We call for public leaders' meetings because we know that the typical Albany pattern will be to discuss ideas over the next few weeks during private negotiations and then secretly hammer out an ethics deal. That secret deal will then be heralded as "historic" with "unprecedented new reforms" that will be a silver bullet to resolve the state's ethics shortcomings. The deal will be folded into the budget or end-of-session crush and the details and practical effects of the new "reforms" will not come to light until they are in operation.

Over time, it will then become clear that loopholes in those "reforms" will undermine many of their asserted benefits. Thus, what was heralded as "historic reforms" will have little positive impact and Albany will return to its status quo – until the next scandal. As a result, New Yorkers' confidence in the integrity of our state government will further erode. This is why it is critical that the leaders' meetings must not be private, but public.

Our organizations have recommended clear, practical reforms that directly address New York's ethics crisis. There also is no shortage of good ethics reform proposals from the governor and some of the legislative conferences. But there has been little public dialogue about how and whether those proposals respond to what some describe as a political crime wave stemming from the outsized role of money in state politics.

Dick Dadey, Executive Director of Citizens Union, said: "Public leaders' meetings on ethics reform are so necessary to ensure that big effective solutions are considered, negotiated, and agreed to, as New Yorkers wait to see how our state's political leaders propose preventing the growing problem of corruption."

"Two months into the start of session and there's still a cloud of corruption hanging over the Legislature," said Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY. "It's up to the Governor and Legislative leaders to clear the air by making a plan in the light of day. Skelos and Silver will be sentenced next month; let's see if Albany can beat the clock. New Yorkers will not accept any more excuses."

"New Yorkers have seen what happens when ethics bills are hammered out in the dark," said Blair Horner, NYPIRG Executive Director. "Laws with too many loopholes and which do not solve Albany's mounting ethics problem. The public doesn't want a rerun, we urge the governor and state lawmakers to take a new approach – one that discusses the people's business in the open, where voters can judge the work."

"Patchwork fixes to Albany's damaged ethics system won't get the job done," said DeNora M. Getachew, Campaign Manager & Legislative Counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice. "The way to restore the public's trust in state government is to debate and agree upon concrete solutions in the light of day. At the top of the list should be closing ethics loopholes, lowering contribution limits and allowing candidates to run competitive campaigns by matching small donations from everyday citizens."

Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director of the League of Women Voters NYS, said: "Ethics reform is long overdue and overwhelmingly supported by the public. It is time for our leaders to discuss reform proposals in an open and transparent leaders' meeting. The League has advocated for ethics reform for over 30 years and it is time for the leaders to openly negotiate effective reforms."

"Albany corruption is an old disease rooted in secrecy. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. If the governor and legislative leaders are at all serious about real reforms, they need to stand up and be accountable in public. No more hiding in the shadows," said John Kaehny, Executive Director of Reinvent Albany.

New Yorkers deserve better. It's time for meaningful actions on ethics where the changes are hammered out in public, not behind closed doors.

[Letter to governor and state legislative leaders linked here.](#)