

Sheila Birnbaum
Chair
NYS Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation
64 Beaver Street, Box 454
New York, NY 1004

Dear Ms. Birnbaum:

This letter is sent to share, in no uncertain terms and strongest language, my opposition to legislative pay raises being considered without such salary increases being linked to meaningful ethics reform of state government and politics. "Business as usual," for far too long, has been an excuse behind which those who benefit from a clearly broken system have been hiding. If our public officials won't behave better of their own volition, they must instead be forced to do so with the threat of severe penalties informing their actions.

Limiting the amount of political contributions, restricting the type of individuals and entities that can make such contributions, increasing disclosure of donors and spending, limiting outside income of legislators and for whom they can work, instituting a public finance system for campaigns, and closing carefully and cynically designed loopholes that allow for unlimited giving (and taking) through "housekeeping" accounts are all vital reforms that would dramatically increase public confidence in our government. It's time for New York - usually a leader in national progressive policy - to stop being the punchline of late night talk show jokes.

Similarly, there must be reform of how our legislature works. Particularly in the State Assembly, Committee Chairs must have more power to shape policy in their topical areas, and be able to hire their own staff. Rather than all being the purview of the Speaker, muscular Committee Chairs would be alternative points of policy influence being able to check the near imperial powers of their legislative leadership.

Lastly, criminal and civil punishments for violating these provisions must be severe. Forfeiture of pensions, increased penalties, and enhanced sentencing provisions must all be passed. Investigative agencies - at all levels of government - need to be empowered and funded.

Certainly, no legislative pay raises should be considered without passing a meaningful and comprehensive ethics reform package that encompasses the above changes.

Sincerely,

Hon. Jenifer Rajkumar

Candidate for State Assembly