

Citizens Union of the City of New York  
Common Cause/NY  
League of Women Voters/N.Y.S.  
New York Public Interest Research Group

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **CITIZENS UNION RELEASES REPORT ENDORSED BY GOOD GOVERNMENT GROUPS SHOWING STUNNING INCREASE IN MISCONDUCT BY STATE LEGISLATORS**

*GROUPS URGE IMMEDIATE ACTION BY GOVERNOR AND STATE LEGISLATURE TO  
REFORM ETHICS TRANSPARENCY, OVERSIGHT and ENFORCEMENT*

Citizens Union today released its report “Examining Turnover in the New York State Legislature: Ethical Misconduct Increasingly the Cause for Legislators Leaving” endorsed by its good government colleagues Common Cause/NY, the League of Women Voters/N.Y.S. and NYPIRG documenting and outlining the reasons for legislative turnover over the last decade and urging for meaningful ethics reform since departures attributable to misconduct are on the rise.

Over the past ten years, the report found that 139 elected state legislators have left office for any number of reasons ranging from ethical misconduct to dying in office. Most notable is the report’s findings that from 1999-2009, 14 legislators left office due to ethical misconduct, criminal charges, or similar issues – with 5 of those of those leaving just during the 2007-2008 legislative session alone. This compares to only 1 from 1999-2000 and none in 2001-2002. This finding underscores an emerging and stunning trend – more legislators are leaving office due to misconduct.

Such a rising trend cries out for a new system of greater transparency, vigilant oversight and effective enforcement in legislative ethics. These critical elements could possibly serve to deter misconduct that goes on, but escapes notice until it is too late.

The civic groups acknowledge that the Assembly has already passed a modest ethics reform bill. The Senate has worked out its own measure that goes further than the Assembly’s approach. And the Governor proposed a far reaching reform measure earlier this year. Now, the two houses appear to be working together to agree on final language, which is a positive development, the civic groups say. However, the goal must be for the Governor and the State Legislature to quickly move beyond discussions to adopt a final measure that becomes law as soon as possible.

The groups emphasized that any final bill should include:

- An appointment process that fosters independent oversight;

- Safeguards barring lobbyists, former officials and other interested parties from serving on ethics oversight bodies;
- Reasonable, reliable, and informative, and transparent financial disclosures; and
- Significant investigatory and enforcement powers, including campaign finance enforcement, and reasonable audit procedures.

In releasing the report, the groups called upon the Governor and the State Legislature to enact sweeping ethics reform to stem the tide of this increasing turnover due to unethical conduct. The research shows that most investigations that resulted in turnover are initiated by law enforcement rather than through the existing ethics oversight structures. The public cannot have confidence in the efficacy and integrity of legislative oversight that fails to police members for ethical indiscretions. New York desperately needs a new ethics system that includes independent oversight, effective administration, strong enforcement, and transparent operations.

The report identified as the other reasons for leaving the following:

- For another office, elected or appointed – 54 legislators
- To retire or to work in the private sector – 31 legislators
- Electoral defeat – 25 legislators
- Redistricting – 8 legislators
- Death – 7 legislators

A full copy of Citizens Union's report and the supporting documents are available on Citizens Union's website at [www.citizensunion.org](http://www.citizensunion.org).