

BRENNAN
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

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Dear Senators:

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law urges you and your colleagues to sign the petitions for chamber consideration that Senators Squadron, Krueger, Rivera, and Addabbo circulated on May 11, 2011. The petitions, which require the signature of three-fifths of members of the Senate, would allow for an “up or down” vote by the full chamber on important ethics bills that would send a message to New Yorkers that their elected officials are serious about cleaning up Albany.

The Brennan Center attended the May 4, 2011 public forum on ethics and testified in support of the four bills in question, offering our suggestions for reforms to restore the public’s trust in the legislature. We believe that the overwhelming majority of our lawmakers in Albany are driven by their sincere commitment to public service. However, it is crucial to recognize that in the eyes of the public, the actions of a few legislators can tarnish the reputation of an entire chamber.

In the past five years, more than a dozen New York State legislators have faced criminal charges, greatly damaging the public’s trust. Legislative leaders and the Governor now have the opportunity to pass core reforms that will help clean up Albany. The bills in question would establish an independent and unified ethics commission, increase financial and client disclosure requirements, restrict the personal use of campaign funds, and ban contributions from state contractors, thus eliminating pay-to-play practices.

Fifty-four Senators signed the New York Uprising pledge, promising to support, among other things, ethics reforms. Your signature would help ensure that all members take a public binding vote on ethics reforms. The public deserves to know where their elected officials stand on these important issues.

As a matter of process, the Brennan Center has long advocated for rules to make it easier for rank-and-file legislators -- not just those in majority -- to advance important issues to the Senate floor for consideration by the entire chamber. The new Senate rules were adopted to create a more open and deliberative body and we are pleased see Senators actually using them.

Your signature on this petition would not necessarily signal your support for all or any of these bills, or foreclose the possibility of additional ethics reforms. It would signal your support for a more open and deliberative process for important issues like ethics reform, and show that members are not afraid to take a public and binding vote on such issues.

Sincerely,



Lawrence Norden,
Deputy Director, Democracy Program