



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Senate Republican Leader Ortt to JCOPE: Investigate Cuomo COVID Testing

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Yesterday evening, New York Senate Leader Rob Ortt issued a formal letter to the Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) demanding the Commission immediately hold a meeting for the purpose of formally commencing a full and comprehensive investigation into the latest troubling allegations that the Governor has broken the law and acted unethically. His call follows Attorney General Letitia James's urging that JCOPE investigate these allegations.

It was widely reported by the Washington Post, Times Union and New York Times that Governor Andrew Cuomo used the power of his public office to prioritize COVID testing for his own family members and top inner-circle friends. He did so during the height of the COVID pandemic -- at a time when COVID testing resources were extremely limited and in high demand in New York's most vulnerable communities, and thousands of people were catching and dying from the virus.

In the letter, Leader Ortt specifically cites the Governor's likely violation of provisions of the Public Officers Code of Ethics as set forth in Section 74, paragraphs d, f, h of subdivision 3 of the Public Officers Law. These provisions of the Code of Ethics apply to all government employees, including the Governor himself.

"It does not take a stretch of the imagination to see a clear connection between Governor Cuomo using his official position as the head of state government and the unwarranted privileges provided to his own family members and close associates. Obviously, while these actions would be egregious during normal times, they are particularly unconscionable because they occurred early on during the pandemic, at a time when testing was in short supply and high demand," Leader Ortt stated in the letter.

For months, Governor Cuomo has been immersed in scandal, and his administration is engulfed in multiple ongoing investigations. Republican State Senators have repeatedly written the Attorney General's office, Senate Committees, the New York Congressional Delegation, and JCOPE urging subpoenas and further investigations to provide oversight and hold the Governor accountable for his troubling actions. Unfortunately, most of these requests -- including matters that the Conference has referred to JCOPE over the years -- have been ignored and brushed aside.

Yesterday, members of the Republican Conference asked for the Governor's diversion of COVID testing resources to be investigated by Attorney General James. However, the Attorney General said she does not have jurisdiction to "investigate these 'troubling' reports of the Governor's preferential treatment for COVID-19 tests, and urged a state ethics commission to do so."

Leader Ortt concluded, "These are deeply troubling revelations and the people of New York need answers. Ethics are in short supply right now in the Cuomo Administration. This demands an investigation and JCOPE must step up to do its job. Anything short of this will demonstrate that JCOPE itself lacks ethics and should be disbanded."

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