

Joint Press Release For Immediate Release

NY and NJ Elected Officials and Advocates Hold Press Conference Encouraging Governors Cuomo and Christie to Sign Historic Port Authority Reform Bills

New York State Assemblymembers Jim Brennan and Amy Paulin along with New Jersey State Senator Robert Gordon and New Jersey State Assemblymember Valerie Vainieri Huttie, joined fellow legislators and advocates today to urge Governors Cuomo and Christie to sign two bi-state reform bills aiming to overhaul the Port Authority. Advocacy groups supporting passage of the historic bills and who were in attendance at today's press conference included the Citizens Union, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, AAA New York, and Reinvent Albany. Since the Port Authority is a bi-state agency, it is necessary for both states to act on the same legislation in order for it to take effect.

The first bill is patterned after reforms enacted in New York State for other authorities which includes: imposing upon the commissioners an ethical duty of loyalty, care, and good faith to the mission of the agency and the public interest in their decision-making; imposing the open meetings law and the ethics and financial disclosure laws of both states on the agency; requiring written policies on land acquisition and disposition; creating independent assessments and holding extensive hearings before a toll increase; requiring a duty to report fraud, abuse, and corruption to the Port Authority Inspector General; and requiring transparency in capital and operating budgets. In New York the bill was sponsored by State Assemblymember Brennan and Senator Lanza and in New Jersey its sponsors are Senator Gordon and Assemblymember Huttie.

The second bill compels the Port to abide by the freedom of information laws of both states. In New York this bill was sponsored by Assemblymember Paulin and Senator Ranzenhofer and in New Jersey its sponsors are Senator Gordon and Assemblymember Huttie.

The bills have passed unanimously in both legislative bodies of New York and New Jersey meaning that with eight votes the bills received an unprecedented vote tally of 612-0. The bills are now before Governor Christie, who has until December 28th to act, while in New York the bills must be sent before the end of the year. Neither Governor has signaled their position on the bills.

"Having identical bills pass all four legislative bodies is a critical step and we remain hopeful that Governors Cuomo and Christie will take the final step by signing both bills into law." New York State Assemblymember Brennan (D-44) said. He added that "the reform bill provides a much needed comprehensive ethical, accountability, and transparency overhaul of the Port Authority modeled on NY's existing laws reforming public authorities, while the companion bill imposes the Freedom of Information Law to the Port Authority."

New Jersey State Senator Bob Gordon (D-Bergen/Passaic) stated, "I believe the actions taken by the New York and New Jersey legislatures are remarkable. For the first time in decades, the two legislatures have worked together, in bipartisan fashion, to enact identical bills that will bring about fundamental reforms at the Port Authority. The support was unanimous—a collective vote of 612 to 0. The message

should be clear. The Port Authority must become open and accountable. The governors should do the right thing and sign the bills."

New York State Senator Andrew Lanza (R-24) stated, "Over the last few years, a number of media reports and an audit issued by the New York State Comptroller showed numerous areas where the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey failed to contain costs and appropriately manage its finances." He also noted that "the Port Authority bears a tremendous amount of responsibility and has the ability to significantly impact the lives of thousands of commuters in New York and New Jersey every day, where residents already bear the highest state-local tax burdens in the country. This legislation is a bi-state, bi-partisan effort to ensure that hard-earned taxpayer dollars are being used efficiently and with the proper amount of oversight at the Port Authority."

New Jersey Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttie (D-Bergen) stated, "Despite the Port Authority's claims of reform, the only way to ensure the agency cleans up its act is for Governors Christie and Cuomo to sign this legislation. Just this past weekend the cost of a single trip across the George Washington Bridge rose to \$14. We are still paying, literally, for the Port Authority's 2011 toll increase process that essentially excluded the public. Our legislation will change the way the Port Authority does business and will give commuters a valued voice. This is a historic moment for New Jersey and New York. Our governors have the opportunity to put good government above politics and I hope they take it for the sake of our residents."

"We finally have the opportunity to effect needed change at the Port Authority," said New York State Assemblywoman Amy Paulin (D-88) who authored the legislation in New York that would subject the Port Authority to the open records laws in both states. "Legislators on both sides of the river have demonstrated that bringing transparency and accountability to the Port Authority is a bipartisan imperative. Meaningful reform is now in the hands of our states' highest leaders."

New York State Senator Golden (R-C-22) said, "In the past, the Port Authority has been able to operate with no requirements for public hearings, financial disclosure by its officials and employees, or to act in the best interest of the citizens of New York and New Jersey. The Port Authority should be held to the same standards as the other agencies and authorities in New York. This bill would do just that."

"The Port Authority reform bills offer a needed chance of bi-state action to meaningfully address the weaknesses in the Port Authority's operations and structure. We ask both Governor Christie and Governor Cuomo to improve the Port Authority's public integrity and bring greater accountability and transparency to this agency by signing these important pieces of legislation." said Dick Dadey, Executive Director of the Citizens Union.

"The Port Authority is not subject to and does not abide by the same rules as are currently imposed on all other state authorities in New York and New Jersey," said Robert Sinclair, spokesman for AAA New York. "This legislation will help bring transparency and accountability to this public authority behemoth by requiring the authority to conduct needs assessment prior to toll hikes, and reforming the public hearing process the authority must adhere to prior to raising tolls and fares." Mr. Sinclair noted that the toll rates on authority bridges and tunnels increased for the fourth time in four years on Sunday. Another toll hike is set for December 2015 when the cash toll will be \$15.

"If Governors Cuomo and Christie are serious about reforming the PANYNJ, they will sign this legislation before December 31, 2014. The passage of this bi-partisan legislation in both states shows there is significant legislative and public support for holding the agency more accountable to the public. Reform can happen in a few days or be postponed several more years. Both governors must heed the call for greater transparency by signing these bills in the days ahead." Janna Chernetz, Senior New Jersey Policy Analyst, Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

"The Port Authority's lack of transparency was already out of date in the Jurassic era. It's time for the Port to move up a couple of millennia in being straight with the public," said Gene Russianoff, Senior Attorney for the New York Public Interest Research Group.

Walter Luers, President of the New Jersey Foundation for Open Government (NJFOG), stated, "NJFOG welcomes this long-overdue reform. We believe that this legislation will provide a much-needed window through which the public can monitor the Port Authority and hold it accountable." Luers acknowledged the significant efforts by legislators of both New York and New Jersey in getting this matter on both Governors' desks. "It took a lot to get to this point. We look forward to this legislation being signed into law," he said.

"These bills overwhelmingly passed the four legislative houses of NY and NJ, because it is self-evident that the Port Authority needs a big dose of transparency and accountability. Governors Christie and Cuomo can show they are for clean, responsive government by signing this bill," said Dominic Mauro, Staff Attorney of Reinvent Albany.

The reform Bills have received strong support by the media with two editorials by the New York Times urging the Governors to sign the legislation. The New York Daily News, the New York Post, the New Jersey Star Ledger and the Staten Island Advance have also printed editorials supporting signature of both bills.

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