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**For Immediate Release -April 10, 2019**



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## **Nassau Comptroller Jack Schnirman Releases First Chapter of County Government Nepotism Audit**

First of its Kind Investigation Examined Practices of County Board of Ethics  
**MINEOLA, NY** - Nassau County Comptroller Jack Schnirman today released the first chapter of his office’s ongoing audit of nepotism within County government. It examined practices of the County’s Board of Ethics, which is charged with investigating reports of nepotism within Nassau County.

“During our audit, we found that the prior Board of Ethics conducted no investigations and levied no sanctions on anyone for any reason during a three-year period which happened to be the height of government corruption locally. It is no surprise allegations of persistent nepotism exist in Nassau County,” Schnirman said. “At a time when the previous County Executive and previous Chief Deputy County Executive were under indictment, it is unbelievable that the prior Board of Ethics found no reason to open any investigations. Our auditors heard at a Board of Ethics meeting the phrase ... If it aint broke... well we are here to say it needs reform.”

The Nassau County Board of Ethics was chosen as the starting point for this audit because it is charged with administering and enforcing the Code of Ethics, which is the primary law governing nepotism in Nassau County.

“A strong code of ethics is the cornerstone of reform,” Schnirman said. “As we said when we started this audit, this isn’t just about putting together a gotcha list of names to make headlines. It’s about getting real results that protect the public.”

The audit uncovered gaps in the collection and review of the financial disclosure forms more than 700 county employees and elected officials are required to fill out annually. It was discovered that some employees still had not filed the forms from 2017 and that in previous years not all forms were reviewed.

“These forms are the first line of defense against nepotism and conflicts of interest, and to learn that the prior Board of Ethics weren’t reviewing these disclosures with a fine-tooth

comb is shocking,” Schnirman said. “County Executive Laura Curran’s recent announcement that they will be modernizing the process to file and review these forms is important progress.”

Auditors found that prior to its current composition, during multiple points in 2017 and 2016, the Board of Ethics had vacancies, and that some of the positions on the board were filled with political leaders or conflicted county employees. All of these practices violate county laws.

“Thankfully, County Executive Curran last year moved to fill the board with independent members who have already gotten started implementing reforms,” Schnirman said.

“Everyone agrees that Nassau County is a place that needs a strong Board of Ethics willing to confront the challenges years of corruption have caused.”

In its response to the Office of the Nassau County Comptroller, the Board of Ethics indicated it had primarily served as an educational entity aimed at preventing problems before they arose. However, in prior years the board did not post or promote the code of ethics for employees and vendors on its website or distribute it to all employees. The previous Board also didn’t allow complaints to be filed online.

“We found a Board of Ethics that had one of the worst-ranked websites in the region that made filing complaints difficult while hiding the advisory opinions it did issue,” Schnirman said. “After our audit was completed, the website was improved, and some opinions were put online for the public to see, which is a welcome improvement.”

“We have already seen improvements as a result of our nepotism audit initiative with a strengthening of the County’s whistleblower policies and the move to electronic financial disclosure forms,” Schnirman said. “The Legislature and the County Executive have been quick to take action in the past when our audits have highlighted needed reform measures and we look forward to discussing our recommendations with them further in the coming weeks.”

Those recommendations include:

- The establishment of a stronger code of ethics
- Actively conduct investigations and implement enforcement actions when appropriate
- Consider imposing sanctions on employees who do not file financial disclosure forms timely
- The development of a more comprehensive policy for reviewing financial disclosure forms
- More independent staff and a dedicated full-time Executive Director assigned to the Board of Ethics.

“The Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity commends Nassau County for taking a critical look at its anti-nepotism policies and for recognizing the important role an independent ethics body must play in government,” said Berit Berger, Executive Director of the Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity at Columbia Law School. “Efforts to help

the Board of Ethics increase its transparency and accessibility will better enable the Board to perform its essential functions.”