

## **New York Legislators Fail to Timely Notify Broad Public of Open Budgetary Meeting**

For Immediate Release: February 20, 2023

Media Contact: Michele Sterlace, 716 864-1454, [info@fclny.org](mailto:info@fclny.org)

In what appears to be a flagrant disregard for NY's [Open Meetings Law](#), representatives of Western New Yorkers hosted a 'public' town hall zoom meeting concerning local allocations relevant to NY's 2024 budget, set for approval on April 1, 2023.

"Of the four NY legislators that hosted the event, only two bothered to provide the general public with any notification, and the two that did, gave constituents just over twenty-four hours notice on their social media" claims Cecelia Lester, constituent of NY Senator Jeremy Cooney, one of the host legislators of the town hall. "Three of the host legislators claimed to have emailed those subscribed to their email notification lists, but that excludes the general public and those constituents not subscribed," states Lester.

"NY's Open Meetings Law was enacted for good reason," says Michele Sterlace, Executive Director of Feminists Choosing Life of New York (FCLNY). "Proper notice of public meetings discussing public policy is "essential to the maintenance of a democratic society," according to the laws own words," she adds. "When members of the public are prevented from engaging, our policies reflect special interests. NY's proposed 2024 budget contains allocations many New Yorkers oppose, including [25 million dollars for abortion access](#) as well as potential allocations for assisted suicide, for example. Pro-life feminists and others have questions and concerns and our voices are being silenced."

According to Lester, vice president of FCLNY: "When I called Senator Cooney's office in early February I was told I would receive notice of the next budgetary town hall meeting by email. After not receiving any email from Cooney or seeing any public notice posted on his website or social media I called his office and was told the meeting had already occurred. I re-scoured Cooney's social media and found one tweet, and one Facebook post published on Sunday evening, February 12th, less than two hours before registration ended for the subject open meeting and less than 48 hours before the start of the public meeting on February 13th at 6 PM."

"Lester, along with others similarly situated, listened to the zoom recording of the public meeting after it occurred," says Sterlace.

Lester explains: "Not a single criticism of the proposed budget was voiced. No unpolished, plain speaking private citizens were present, people interested in voicing concerns on behalf of their struggling families. No organizations that opposed the policies of the legislators were present either. Yet the meeting opened with all four representatives extolling the necessity of hearing the concerns of constituents in order to fulfill the highest potential of the community and its citizens. One host legislator called the budget a moral document, while another expressed a belief in the primacy of transparency."

"A dangerous disconnect is occurring between our elected representatives and the people," says Sterlace. According to Lester, "The result is radical bills in NY are proposed and passed, such as NY's [Reproductive Health Act](#) and possibly now, the pending [Medical Aid in Dying Act](#). When legislators control the messaging they hear from constituents— an echo chamber of hyper partisanship reigns. This is why citizens are fleeing at record numbers," Lester believes. "So many New Yorkers' needs are unmet. Perhaps this is intentional, to reinforce the echo chamber and radicalize NY even further. What is certain," Lester adds, "it will be increasingly difficult to craft a budget in NY with fewer and fewer taxpayers."