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NOW-NYC Calls for Resignation or Removal of State Police Superintendent Corbitt

New York, NY, February 26, 2010 – The National Organization for Women’s New York City Chapter today demanded immediate accountability in Governor Paterson’s administration by calling for the resignation or removal of State Police Superintendent Harry Corbitt.

“Governor Paterson’s announcement that he will not run for election in November does not remove the need for immediate accountability,” said Jane Manning, President of NOW-NYC. “The conduct of state police officers in this case was egregious, and the Superintendent’s effort to justify their conduct has been outrageous.”

Superintendent Corbitt acknowledged that a State Police officer—whose department had no jurisdiction in the case—contacted the woman, who was seeking an order of protection after alleged physical abuse by Paterson’s high-ranking aide David Johnson. The woman reported in court that the state police pressured her to drop her case. Corbitt has claimed that it was appropriate for state police to intervene in the case, because the high profile of the defendant created a “special circumstance.”

“This explanation defies common sense,” Manning said. “The state police officer who confronted the victim was a member of the Governor’s personal security detail – someone who would have worked side-by-side with the abuser. It is nothing short of outrageous that this officer was allowed to have official contact with the victim, who reported that she was in fact pressured to drop her case.”

NOW leaders called the case a window into the plight of domestic violence victims. “It is nothing unusual for a domestic violence victim, who has already been through a violent ordeal, to face harassment by her batterer, his family and friends, and his attorney,” Manning said. “In this case, the terrifying difference is that the harassment had the muscle of state government and the state police force behind it.”

Law enforcement and government officials must be held to the highest standard set forth by the laws of New York State. In an effort to achieve a zero tolerance for domestic violence, well over 100 pieces of legislation regarding domestic violence have been signed into law over the last ten years, according to the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.

“These high-profile cases of domestic violence involving government officials show just how much domestic violence is epidemic in our community, transcending class, race and age,” said Sonia Ossorio, Executive Director of NOW-NYC. “Lawmakers, activists and health care workers have worked for decades in this state to create a system that protects victims. We have to hold everyone, especially our leaders, accountable.”

The National Organization for Women is the nation’s largest organization working to advance women’s rights and improve women’s lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is one of the largest chapters in the country with 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to protect women’s reproductive choices, end violence against women and eliminate sex discrimination in our schools, workplaces, and the justice system in New York.

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