



The Honorable David A. Paterson
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

January 22, 2010

Dear Governor Paterson:

We are writing to ask you to fire Agriculture & Markets Commissioner Pat Hooker for his outrageous and baseless attack on the integrity of small business owners across New York State.

Governor, you know firsthand the impact of scurrilous charges. But it is one thing for a private lawyer or special ed teacher having lunch to tell the press what they thought they saw, and another thing for a Commissioner in State government to attack small business owners in the media without offering a shred of evidence. This type of personal attack, if you simply let it stand, will only add to the cynicism New Yorkers increasingly feel about their government.

During a media conference call organized by your office on Thursday, Commissioner Hooker recklessly claimed that New York winery owners were “coerced to sign letters and documents” stating their opposition to your job-killing plan to legalize wine sales in 19,000 new outlets by wine and liquor store owners. If Commissioner Hooker has any evidence that anyone was “coerced,” he should take it to the appropriate authorities. There should be no tolerance for those types of tactics, nor should there be any tolerance for making irresponsible claims without evidence.

We urge you to demand that Hooker provide evidence to back up his claims. Who signed what letter or document, and who coerced them? If he cannot back up this charge, we urge you to fire him on the spot. We hope that you will demonstrate a zero-tolerance policy for attacks on hardworking taxpayers by members of your administration.

Frankly, we find the arrogance of Hooker’s claims equally as troubling. His condescending attitude toward winery owners is astounding. Does he find it so hard to believe that not everyone agrees with him? Does he really believe the only way anyone can disagree with him is if they are “coerced?” Is this the kind of person you want representing you?

We, and store owners we represent, are not politicians. We don’t seek the spotlight and have no other agenda than to protect our families, our future and our livelihoods. We are regular taxpayers trying to make it as small business owners in a tough economy. We do not deserve to be attacked by a Commissioner who swears an oath to serve the people of New York.

Governor, we can disagree on a bad policy without name calling or baseless attacks. Taxpayers deserve better than a State Commissioner who makes up charges to support a weak argument in favor of a bad policy.

Sincerely,



Michael Correra
Executive Director
Metropolitan Package
Store Association



Stefan Kalogridis
President
New York State Liquor
Store Association



Jeff Saunders
President
Retailers Alliance
and coalition member