

Governor Hochul Continues Cuomo/Spitzer Legacy Of Corruption

Hochul engages in marijuana merger interference and retaliatory firing.

ALBANY, NEW YORK, USA, May 26, 2022

/EINPresswire.com/ -- While legacy growers who sold marijuana when it was illegal in New York State fight in Albany today to be included in the new, government-run market, Governor Kathy Hochul is already embroiled in a scandal tied to the fledgling legal pot industry. Before the government weed market is even fully on its feet, Hochul is at the center of an [explosive legal settlement](#) claiming unethical state influence over a merger between Boston-based cannabis retailer Ascend Wellness and pot dispensary chain MedMen.

In the now-settled lawsuit (case number 650220/2022), MedMen alleged that Hochul's office pushed to force the merger through at a bargain price on Ascend's behalf after Ascend executives donated \$15,000 to her reelection campaign last fall. MedMen had recently shown interest in deposing Hochul, with the company's attorney Alex Spiro of Quinn Emanuel ramping up allegations about her clear fundraising connections to Ascend Wellness in a March 8 amended complaint.

"Ascend retained two lobbying firms, Dickinson & Avella and Greenberg Traurig, and began a campaign of political donations plainly directed at influencing the most powerful political actor in the state – New York Governor Kathy Hochul," MedMen alleged in the amended complaint.

Ascend Wellness has agreed to pay an extra \$15 million to buy MedMen, according to court filings. This hikes the merger purchase price by 20% to \$88 million. The lawsuit was clearly settled to avoid any further disclosures of pay-to-play activity between Gov. Hochul and Ascend Wellness executives.



Kathy Hochul, 57th Governor of New York. Source: Wikimedia Commons

“This settlement lays bare the only reasons state government legalized the weed business in the first place: profit through compulsory taxation and control through needless regulation,” said Duane Whitmer, [Libertarian Party of New York](#) 2nd Vice-Chair. “Governor Hochul used the heavy hand of government to tip the scales in favor of her cronies at Ascend Wellness. She pushed to force the merger deal with MedMen through at a bargain price on Ascend’s behalf. Why? Because Ascend’s executives donated \$15,000 to her reelection campaign last fall. Government control of the legal weed industry isn’t about ‘correcting the racial injustices of the drug war’ as progressives would have you believe. It’s about money and power. Plain and simple.”



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The apparent quid pro quo relationship between the Governor’s Office and Ascend Wellness demonstrates Kathy Hochul is eagerly carrying forward the legacy of corruption built by her predecessors: disgraced Governors Andrew Cuomo and Elliot Spitzer. Further evidence of this was reported by the Times Union on Friday in a story outlining Hochul’s involvement in the retaliatory firing and forced resignation of two top officials at the State

Insurance Fund, according to a lawsuit filed in March.

New York State Insurance Fund Ethics Officer Melissa Saren felt a colleague might be improperly steering a contract to a politically connected law firm. She filed a complaint with New York’s ethics oversight body over the matter last September. Three days later, a top aide to Governor Kathy Hochul allegedly instructed Woods to resign. Less than three weeks following that, Saren was fired without explanation from her longtime job at the Insurance Fund.

Saren has filed a lawsuit against the state, contending that her “retaliatory termination” was “executed with the knowledge and approval of Governor Kathleen Hochul’s Executive Chamber.” The state Court of Claims lawsuit, filed in mid-March, contends Saren was fired simply for “doing the job that she was hired to” – to report unethical behavior.

“The name outside the Governor’s Mansion changes following successive criminal scandals: Spitzer, then Cuomo, now Hochul,” Whitmer said. “But one thing never changes: the criminal and predatory nature of our ‘elected’ leaders and the fact that New York State government cannot be reformed.”

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