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Inspector General**

NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General Letizia Tagliafierro

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NY INSPECTOR GENERAL TAGLIAFIERRO'S INVESTIGATION OF ROBERT FREEMAN SHOWS PERSISTENT PATTERN OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF HIGH-PROFILE POSITION

Investigation began when reporter filed complaint with the Inspector General's Office

Freeman admitted to inappropriate behavior and was terminated

New York State Inspector General Letizia Tagliafierro today announced that her office's investigation into allegations of sexual harassment by Robert Freeman, the former executive director of the New York State Committee on Open Government, shows that he engaged in a persistent pattern of sexual harassment against multiple victims, misused state resources and had inappropriate material on his state computer.

Additionally, the investigation found that Freeman's status as a go-to source for the New York news media made it possible for him to continuously victimize reporters who believed they were left with no recourse in which to hold him accountable for his actions. The investigation uncovered multiple such stories and first-hand accounts from reporters and public sector employees.

"Mr. Freeman habitually engaged in sexual harassment of multiple women over many years," said Inspector General Tagliafierro. "Given the stature Freeman attained during his tenure as executive director, his role as the sole authority on government transparency, and the power dynamic he repeatedly promoted, many of the women who spoke with my office said they believed it would be futile to report his misconduct. However, there are now multiple pathways for reporting such behavior and my office stands ready to assist anyone who believes they have been victimized by state employees."

The investigation began June 13, 2019, when the Offices of the New York State Inspector General received a detailed written complaint from a newspaper reporter alleging that at a meeting on May 23, 2019, Freeman squeezed her shoulder; touched her waist, back, and buttocks with his hand; parted her braids from her face and placed them behind her shoulder; hugged her; and kissed her on her cheek while holding her head. The complainant also described very personal and inappropriate statements made by Freeman to her at this meeting, which included gender- and racially-based derogatory comments.

A review of Freeman's work emails revealed his repeated inappropriate use of State resources. Specifically, this review found that Freeman used his work email account to improperly communicate with a woman he had met as part of his official duties. This series of sexually suggestive emails from October 2018 through June 2019 included provocative photographic images sent by the woman to Freeman.

Additionally, a forensic computer analysis of Freeman's work computer revealed several image files of naked women and hundreds of image files depicting scantily clad women, all likely obtained through the internet. The New York State Office of Information Technology Services, which is responsible for the Committee on Open Government's computer systems, repeatedly removed and reinstalled all software on Freeman's work computer because its operating system had become plagued with viruses and other malicious software.

Further, the investigation found that the New York Department of State, in which the Committee on Open Government is housed, was aware of and had acted against Freeman for prior incidents of inappropriate conduct toward women. Specifically, the investigation found that the Department of State verbally admonished Freeman in 2003 after a coworker complained that Freeman had kissed her while the two were in a hotel lobby on a business trip. And in 2013, Freeman was investigated by the Department of State for claims of inappropriate behavior in the workplace towards several female department employees.

On June 24, 2019, the Inspector General referred initial findings to the Department of State, which terminated Freeman's employment that day.

In the aftermath of Freeman's termination, numerous additional allegations surfaced regarding Freeman's conduct toward members of the media as well as State and local government employees. Several newspapers published reporters' accounts of their uncomfortable encounters with Freeman that exhibited common themes.

The findings of this investigation illustrate Freeman's continual abuse of his official position. As such, this report was provided to the New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics for its review of possible violations of the New York State Public Officers Law's Code of Conduct and provisions governing the use of State resources.

The full report is available on the Inspector General's website: [Investigation of Robert Freeman, Former Executive Director of the New York State Committee on Open Government](#).

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