



## Norcross-Linked Firms Demand Chance to Speak on Tax Credits

**Lawyers for southern New Jersey companies tied to an influential Democratic leader that got million in tax credits are demanding a chance to testify as part of a state task force's investigation into incentives.**

By Associated Press, Wire Service Content May 6, 2019

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — New Jersey companies tied to an influential Democratic leader and awarded millions in tax credits demanded on Monday a chance to testify as part of a state task force's investigation into incentives.

Attorneys for Cooper University Health Care and insurance firm Conner Strong & Buckelew said in a letter to the task force they will pursue legal action if not given a chance to speak at the next meeting of Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy's tax credit panel.

George Norcross, an unelected powerbroker in Camden County, chairs Cooper's board and is executive chairman of Conner Strong & Buckelew. He's a major fundraiser and long-time booster for Camden, one of the state's poorest cities that stood to benefit from the soon-to-expire tax credit programs established under Republican Chris Christie.

The letter comes after the task force on Thursday raised questions about whether the firms met obligations to get incentives.

Cooper received \$40 million over 10 years — with about \$13 million already paid out — and Conner Strong & Buckelew got approved for about \$86 million over a decade under the Economic Development Authority program.

"While we believe that the Task Force has been unlawfully constituted and is operating outside of any recognized statutory authority, it is evident that you intend to continue," the attorneys wrote. "The Task Force's application of public monies to fund its investigation demands that the accused be afforded an opportunity to respond fully to allegations made against them."

During Thursday's hearing, the task force presented emails showing that Cooper said it had initially no intention of leaving New Jersey but then later said it was considering a move to Philadelphia, which the EDA cited as a factor in awarding the credits.

Conner Strong & Buckelew also said it was considering a move across the Delaware River to Philadelphia, but the task force showed that it was considering a location on multiple floors of a building, and had initially said it needed 153,000 square feet of space and then later said it would consider just 110,000 square feet of space. John Boyd, of corporate site-consulting firm The Boyd Company, told the panel that it would be unusual for any firm to seek a location on multiple floors of a building.

In the letter, the lawyers also questioned whether Murphy had the authority to issue subpoenas through the task force. Task force chairman Ron Chen defended Murphy's authority to issue subpoenas in a statement.

Chen did not address the request to comment publicly.

Murphy set the task force up this year after a comptroller's audit showed the EDA failed to verify whether companies met certain benchmarks before getting awards. The task force hired the New York firm of Walden Macht & Haran to conduct its investigation. According to records obtained by The Associated Press, the firm has charged the state about \$1.3 million to date.

Another signatory to the letter was a lawyer for the firm Parker McCay, which was cited during Thursday's hearing as well. Kevin Sheehan, a lawyer at the firm, helped write the legislation granting the tax credits, according to draft legislation obtained by the task force. The firm's CEO is Norcross' brother Philip Norcross.

A date has not been set.