



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

JOCELYN E. STRAUBER
COMMISSIONER

180 MAIDEN LANE
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212-825-5900

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**CONTACT: DIANE STRUZZI
CLODAGH MCGOWAN
(212) 825-5931**

**Keynote Remarks for the Association of Inspectors General Conference
"Chasing Facts, Not Headlines: Navigating Obstacles While Staying the Course"
9-10 am, Tuesday, Nov. 11, 2025, San Diego, CA**

Welcome & Intro

Welcome everyone, and thank you Will, for that kind introduction. It is uplifting for me to be here with all of you, because we share a commitment to public transparency, to rigorous investigations guided by the facts and the law, and to improvement of government through independent oversight. Gathering at this time is particularly important, as we try to make sense of the dismantling of the federal non-partisan oversight framework that has served our country so well for so long, regardless of the political party in power, and the firings of colleagues who have served honorably as Federal Inspectors General. One of those colleagues is going to be speaking later this morning and I'm looking forward to hearing his perspective on what is a disheartening time for all of us, including those of us who serve in these roles at the state and local levels.

I find reasons to be optimistic in the way that our federal colleagues, and other current and former federal employees have spoken out, and have sought through lawsuits and public statements to hold the administration accountable for its failure to follow the law. And as I think about what each of us can do, who currently play a role in government, I want to share with you the words of Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor of the Atlantic, when asked if he was concerned about retaliation for making public that he found himself in a Signal chat with Department of Defense officials who were discussing the planning of an attack on Yemen. He said: "It's not my role to care about the possibility of threats or retaliation. We just have to come to work and do our jobs to the best of our ability. Unfortunately, in our society today . . . there's too much preemptive obeying for my taste. All we can do is just go do our jobs." Or, as Jon Stewart succinctly put it, "You don't compromise on what you do, and you do it till they tell you to leave. That's all you can do."

I know that all of you take those principles to heart and have lived by them long before facing today's unique challenges.

The work that we do – finding facts without fear or favor, following facts regardless where or to whom they lead, reaching conclusions that are objective, apolitical and based on rigorous investigations, providing transparency about what government has done wrong and how it can do better – has never been easy. Navigating pressures from agencies and administrations that we oversee, legislative bodies that refer matters to us, and other public stakeholders is delicate, difficult and a fundamental part of our jobs.

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This morning, I want to focus on the lessons I've learned over the past few years as the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation about how to do oversight work successfully, amidst these pressures and challenges. There are many components that contribute to an oversight agency's success – statutory authority and protections; excellent, committed staff; law enforcement relationships; and critically, the relationship between the oversight entity and the individuals and government agencies that we oversee. That relationship, and those agencies' mindset and approach to oversight, can limit – or expand and strengthen – the oversight agency's impact.

To understand how DOI handles investigations, it is important to understand our history, so let me first give you some background about the agency and also about how I approach our work.

History of DOI

DOI was founded in 1873, in response to the rampant corruption of William “Boss” Tweed and his cronies, who controlled virtually every part of New York City government, including its finances and politics. They used their power to extract kickbacks in exchange for awarding City contracts, inflating the costs of City projects by literally millions of dollars to cover the bribes that they received in exchange. Their misconduct was documented in publications such as *Harpers Weekly* and *The New York Times*, and the Times published an exposé in 1871 that revealed among other things that the City kept two sets of books – one for the actual cost of projects and one for the inflated costs that included kickbacks to Tweed and his cronies. The resulting public outcry led to the prosecution and conviction of Boss Tweed, and the formation of an independent agency initially called the Commissioner of Accounts – that was later expanded to become today's DOI.

Over our 152-year history DOI has continuously evolved to adapt to the realities of New York City government. In 1873 the agency had two Commissioners of Accounts and a narrow mandate to regularly check the books of the City's Comptroller and Chamberlain – a now-defunct position that managed the City's finances -- to prevent looting by City officials.

Mayors have strengthened DOI's authority over time, including our access to information, through a number of Executive Orders, most notably during the late 1970s through the mid-1980s. Those orders give DOI the authority to access most City records, emails and other documents without a subpoena and to compel interviews of City employees and vendors. They also mandate that all City employees who become aware of corruption and fraud must report it to DOI or risk discipline. By statute, DOI has the power to subpoena third parties – non-City employees – for documents and for testimony, which DOI is authorized to take under oath

By the mid-1980s, DOI oversaw a sprawling Inspector General program in the City. At that time, the IGs and their investigative teams worked out of their “home agencies,” with dual reporting to each agency's Commissioner and to the DOI Commissioner. In 1986, in the wake of DOI's failure to adequately investigate allegations that City officials took bribes in exchange for awarding lucrative contracts for unpaid parking ticket collection – the so-called Parking Violations Bureau Scandal -- DOI was reorganized to its current structure by Executive Order, with all Inspectors General reporting to the DOI Commissioner and working primarily in DOI's offices. DOI's budget and headcount increased from 121 to 694 staff, including background investigators, corruption-prevention analysts, and other investigative specialists.

By establishing DOI as **the** City agency responsible for combatting City-related corruption, and removing mayoral agency oversight of Inspectors General, the reorganization provided DOI and the IGs with an important measure of independence and facilitated a more unified and streamlined approach to DOI's anti-corruption mission. The new structure promoted information-sharing among Inspectors General, leading to valuable insights into corruption vulnerabilities impacting multiple agencies.

Today, following budget cuts that reduced our headcount by about 100 over the last few years, DOI has approximately 430 staff – Inspectors General, investigators, attorneys, auditors, data analysts, law enforcement technology professionals, and operational staff. The DOI Commissioner, who must be an attorney, is appointed by the Mayor and is one of only two Commissioners subject to City Council confirmation, which involves the submission of extensive background information to the Council and a full public hearing. The process is designed to ensure not only that the Commissioner is qualified for the job, but that they can act independently of the Mayor. By City Charter, the Commissioner can be fired by the Mayor but only with a public statement of reasons, to which the Commissioner has an opportunity to respond.

DOI's jurisdiction is broad, with the statutory power, by City Charter, "to make any study or investigation which in [the Commissioner's] opinion may be in the best interests of the city, including but not limited to investigations of the affairs . . . of any agency." The Mayor and New York City Council also may direct the DOI Commissioner to conduct investigations.

Our investigations and factual findings can lead to criminal prosecutions, disciplinary proceedings and other administrative actions. Based on our findings, DOI makes recommendations for policy and procedural reform to City agencies, aimed at addressing corruption vulnerabilities and preventing misconduct from re-occurring. For matters of great public interest or significant impact in New York City, DOI issues public reports, more extensive discussions of our factual findings and the basis for our recommendations for reform.

In addition to criminal and disciplinary investigations, DOI investigates potential conflicts of interest that may result in referrals to the Conflicts of Interest Board, the City's ethics agency, as well as claims of retaliation against employees of agencies and City contractors who report misconduct and are protected by the City's Whistleblower Law. DOI also provides other critical services to the City, including background investigations for certain City employees and vendor name checks for City-funded vendors.

Personal Background

Serving as DOI Commissioner is my first experience in City government. I joined the agency after twenty-four years as an attorney in the public and private sectors, most recently as a partner at a large private law firm handling white collar criminal defense matters for over eight years, and for eight years before that as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Southern District of New York, focusing on international narcotics and terrorism cases.

I will say here – and I think you will all know what I mean – that there is nothing quite like public service if you are after opportunities to exercise significant responsibility at an early stage in your career and to do meaningful and exciting work that positively impacts your community and beyond.

I am particularly thankful that I had the opportunity to serve as a federal prosecutor earlier in my career, in the Southern District of New York. The Office shaped how I think about the investigative process and the practice of law and set a standard that I strive to meet to this day. Its guiding principle is to do the right thing, for the right reasons, in the right way, every day. One of the key lessons for me was that to uphold that standard – to do the right thing -- you must be fair, you must be independent, and you must be guided entirely by the facts and the law. And to do that, you must be rigorous in your assessment of information that you think you know, questioning what you might be missing, looking at a situation from all sides and recognizing that your initial conclusions may be wrong. You must test not only your theories, but your assumptions and your biases, of which you may not be fully aware. Without that rigor you cannot seek the truth, and you cannot pursue justice.

This measured approach is particularly important in law enforcement and in the oversight work that we do, where the conclusions we reach and the cases that we bring have a profound and immediate impact on people's lives. We must guard against a drive to reach any particular outcome, which can lead investigators to dismiss evidence at odds with their initial suspicions, rather than to follow the evidence where it leads. Law enforcement does not always get it right, even with the best of intentions. I learned that as a prosecutor, and I also saw that as a defense attorney, both early in my career and more recently in the eight years I spent in private practice before coming to DOI.

These lessons guide me every day – in our criminal investigations, where liberty is at stake, in the reports where we make and publicize findings about the conduct of City officials and agencies, and parties who contract with them, and in publicly issued recommendations where we propose that agencies implement reforms.

Critical Components to DOI's Success

DOI has a storied legacy of success as an independent oversight agency, from its initial responsibility to ensure the accuracy of the City's accounts, through and including the tumultuous past four years in New York City government. In the Bloomberg administration, DOI's work included a wide-ranging investigation of a project to install a digital payroll system, recovering \$500 million for the City from the project's prime vendor and securing eight convictions; an in-depth inquiry into the City's Administration for Children's Services handling of nearly a dozen child fatality cases, finding that the agency's investigations

in response to allegations that these children were in danger were inadequate and making recommendations for improvement. In the de Blasio administration, DOI investigated the Mayor's misuse of his NYPD security detail, including in connection with his presidential run, resulting in the conviction of an NYPD Inspector for obstruction, a public report about the absence of guidance and standards around security details, and a settlement in which the former Mayor agreed to pay nearly \$330,000 in fines.

During my tenure over the past three-and-a-half years, with our prosecutorial and law enforcement partners, we arrested 70 NYCHA superintendents who took bribes in exchange for awarding no-bid contracts in the largest anti-corruption takedown in DOJ history in a single day; brought the first criminal indictment against a sitting Mayor in the City's history, for bribery and accepting illegal foreign campaign contributions; charged the Mayor's chief advisor, a senior agency official, eight others, and two companies, in a bribery conspiracy case; charged two former high-ranking Fire Department officials with taking bribes in exchange for letting businesses with pending fire prevention plans "jump the line" for plan review; and charged a former Buildings Commissioner with accepting \$150,000 worth of bribes while serving as a City Councilmember, Senior Advisor to the Mayor, and Buildings Commissioner.

And our other work didn't stop – we continued to bring cases targeting misconduct throughout the City, including contraband smuggling in the City's jails and juvenile detention centers; construction fraud, and theft of public funds by City employees and others. Since 2022, we also issued about 690 policy and procedure recommendations for reform, and issued 38 public reports, including an investigation into NYPD's gang database; the impact of state legislation on safety, disciplinary and staffing challenges at the City's juvenile detention centers; an examination of 51 City-funded nonprofits that operate City homeless shelters that found compliance and governance risks; an assessment of NYPD's social media use; and an investigation finding that a City Correction Department investigator violated City Sanctuary City laws by sharing information about the pending release of a person in custody with ICE.

What made these accomplishments possible? Three things: our extraordinary staff, our close law enforcement partnerships and our strong agency relationships.

DOI Staff

First, our experienced investigators, auditors, data analysts and law enforcement technology professionals, some of whom are here this morning, who have deep knowledge of New York City government, the intricacies of the City's procurement and contracting process, and the risks posed by City vendors, among many other matters unique to the City. Our legal authority enables us to quickly and covertly obtain large volumes of City data, but it is our extensive knowledge of how New York City government functions that makes DOI's staff so uniquely qualified and well-positioned for the work that we do. Equally important is their relentless approach to their work, their commitment to pursue leads as far as they can go, no matter where or to whom a case may lead. That is a function of our independence that is promoted and protected by the laws and Executive Orders that I've described, and that is also deeply ingrained in the values and culture of the agency, at all levels. This approach serves us equally whether we are pursuing a criminal investigation with prosecutorial partners or conducting an inquiry that may expose flaws in the City's contracting process or in the NYPD's handling of social media accounts. Just as significant is our commitment to a rigorous investigative methodology, the discipline to make findings only where we have sufficient evidence to do so and the willingness to readily acknowledge when we lack sufficient information to make findings.

DOI's Law Enforcement Partnerships

Second, our law enforcement relationships. I believe, as did my predecessors, that DOI should be a key investigative partner in any criminal inquiry involving any aspect of City government. Not only can we shed light on relevant aspects of City process that prosecutors and federal agents might be unaware of, we can recommend necessary reforms, and we can help ensure that the City receives any restitution or remedy to which it may be entitled. Many criminal inquiries start in our Office, and when we see a potential criminal charge, we quickly bring in our state or federal prosecutorial partners, as well as other law enforcement partners where needed. We work collaboratively with them from the early stages of an inquiry, so that the investigation is a joint endeavor, which in our experience builds the strongest possible case. Our deep, trusted law enforcement relationships are a function of the knowledge and persistence we bring to the table, our covert access to City records and documents, but also our independence from the City agencies and individuals that often are targets of our investigations. No prosecutor would trust us otherwise, and rightly so. And those relationships are true partnerships, a two-way street, such that if a prosecutor or federal law

enforcement office begins an investigation that touches on City government, they will involve DOI as well. Those relationships are the key to the cases that DOI successfully pursued during my tenure, particularly the federal and state criminal cases against senior City Hall officials. And I think DOI is even more critical to federal criminal corruption investigations now than we were before, because federal resources are increasingly diverted to the administration's other law enforcement goals, in particular violent crime and immigration.

You might rightly question the future of federal public corruption investigations in New York City in light of the Department of Justice's early 2025 dismissal of the indictment of Mayor Eric Adams. And here I want to quote the District Judge, who in reference to the dismissal motion stated: "Everything here smacks of a bargain, dismissal of the Indictment in exchange for immigration policy concessions." Only time will tell how the current DOJ will handle these cases, particularly high-profile matters that are deemed to impact the federal government's priorities. But I can say that the unique circumstances of the Adams case do not reflect a retreat from federal public corruption investigations more broadly, and DOI's work on these important cases continues, not only with New York City's District Attorneys' Offices, but our federal prosecutorial partners as well.

It was disappointing and frustrating for all of us at DOI to see a case that we had worked so hard on end in the way that it did. The remarkable circumstances of the dismissal were not ones we could have prevented and they did not cast doubt on the validity of the charges, the underlying evidence, or the conduct of the investigation. Despite the ultimate outcome of the prosecution, we did our job – we contributed our investigative skills and our New York City expertise to build a case resulting in a detailed indictment that set out the Mayor's alleged criminal conduct. We made clear to the public that the City's watchdog was in fact doing the work that the taxpayers expect us to do, and doing it independently of the Administration. And the indictment – though only an allegation – set out the benefits the Mayor allegedly received, how he did so, and what he did in exchange. I am proud of DOI's work on that case, and I am proud of the prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, including the then-Acting U.S. Attorney, and in the Department of Justice's Public Corruption Unit, for their decisions to resign rather than move to dismiss the indictment of the Mayor. As is now publicly known, that case began before Mayor Adams took office, and well before he expressed opposition to President Biden's immigration policies, opposition had no relevance whatsoever to the investigation or indictment from my perspective.

DOI's Strong Agency Relationships

Returning to the critical elements of DOI's success, the third element is our City agency relationships. Reporting corruption to DOI is legally mandated – by City employees at all levels – and employees who report have whistleblower protection by City law. The legal mandate and protections are critical, but strong agency relationships and an open line of communication from the agency to DOI, at senior leadership levels, are equally important. Beyond known instances of corruption, when agencies share concerns and suspicions and seek advice, DOI can identify deeper problems if any or flag issues that can be addressed promptly, to mitigate or prevent more serious misconduct.

Make no mistake, mandated reporting is no substitute for open regular communication. That communication requires trust, and DOI seeks to earn that trust by delivering on its commitment to handle complaints objectively, fairly and independently. We strive to be objective and fair in the findings that we make with respect to both the individuals and institutions that are implicated in our investigations. We also build trust by treating our agency partners with respect, even when we are critical of them. We do not use our platform and our authority to surprise or sandbag agencies, or City Hall. We share our findings and recommendations with agencies before issuing them publicly to ensure we have the facts right and to seek input on the feasibility of our proposals. Agencies do not always agree with our conclusions, but we change them only if we are persuaded we have made factual errors. Similarly, we change our recommendations only if we are persuaded that they are misguided or wrong, not merely because an agency may disagree with our approach or lack the funding to implement the changes that we propose.

Thus, the key factor in a strong relationship between DOI and the agencies we oversee is agency leadership that prioritize integrity and transparency and that wants DOI to know about potential problems so that we can help fix them, even if that means exposing problems to us and to the public, rather than seeking to handle them internally, and confidentially. That kind of agency leadership facilitates more productive DOI investigations, and, I have found, those leaders run better agencies. They set a tone at the

top that values compliance, integrity and transparency and the importance of the tone at the top is a truism for a reason.

I want to be clear that despite the criminal cases that DOI brought against Commissioners of City agencies and senior members of the City Hall administration over the past four years, there have been many more Commissioners and senior officials who care deeply about the integrity of the institutions they oversee, are committed to transparency and openness with DOI, and are receptive to our recommendations for change. At the agency level, those relationships contribute to significant charges we have brought against City employees and City vendors, as well as critical changes in agency policy and procedure, based on DOI recommendations, that will mitigate the risk of future misconduct.

Similarly, at the City Hall level, DOI's strong relationships have supported and enhanced DOI's ability to do its work. For example, in the relatively rare occasions where an agency has withheld information from us, in violation of Executive Orders – has chosen to handle corruption complaints in-house, without referring them promptly to DOI or without referring them at all – we have asked for and received assistance from senior City Hall officials to make clear that reporting and cooperating with DOI is mandated by Executive Orders and the City Charter and is not optional. That assistance was given despite DOI's involvement at that time in investigations and ultimately prosecutions of other senior City Hall officials and it underscores what I hope all of us in this room know through the work that we do – that the vast majority of government employees are dedicated public servants, who seek to comply with the law, do the right thing and act with integrity.

I have also found that in those cases where we have had difficulty getting access to the information we are legally entitled to, the most effective remedy, along with the type of assistance I just mentioned, is to hold training sessions for the senior executives of the agency involved and their teams, and to require the senior executives to participate in the training and reinforce our message, so that the entire team gets the message not just from DOI, but from their own senior leaders, that their obligations to report and cooperate with us must be taken seriously. Because that kind of messaging from agencies we oversee – again, the tone at the top -- is critically important to DOI's ability to do its job effectively.

It is important to note that in addition to these types of important assistance, at no time did any City Hall official or agency head seek to pressure me, or any member of my executive team, to drop an investigation, to pursue an investigation for an improper purposes, or to alter a public report or recommendation for inappropriate reasons. Although DOI faced budget cuts, as did all City agencies, I have no evidence that cuts to DOI's budget were in retaliation for the work that we did. And when I stood with my colleagues at the Department of Justice and the FBI to announce the indictment of Mayor Adams, or co-announced with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office charges against a key senior advisor to the Mayor, Mayor Adams did not fire me and did not ask me to resign.

Critical Improvements

While all of this suggests that the current framework, including the legal protections for the DOI Commissioner, work effectively, I believe more can and should be done to enhance the protections for DOI and its role in City government. There are three improvements that I would like to see.

First, greater protections for the Commissioner and the agency from any threat of retaliation. Particularly after the case against the Mayor was dismissed amidst allegations that the investigation was politically motivated, the requirement that the Mayor make a public statement of reasons to support terminating a DOI Commissioner, with no right of appeal to the City Council, court or other authority, no longer seemed particularly robust protection.

Therefore, when in early 2025 the New York City Council undertook an effort to revise the City Charter, including to provide additional protections for independent oversight agencies, DOI worked with the City Council staff and Charter Revision Commission members to support that effort, proposing that any removal of the DOI Commissioner be for cause, with the opportunity for a hearing.

Second, budget independence for DOI, from both Mayoral and City Council control. While as I said I have no evidence that DOI's budget was cut for retaliatory reasons, DOI has not been a budgetary priority for this administration, despite repeated City Council efforts to secure more funding and staffing for our agency. The difficulty obtaining additional headcount, and limited control over the timing and number of hires and over raises and promotions makes recruiting and retaining key staff for our critical investigations

far more difficult. Constantly shifting standards and rules around hiring make long-term strategic planning almost impossible. Therefore, as the charter revision process, DOI also is seeking budget independence. With budget independence, our budget would be a set percentage of the City's budget and we would have complete control over our hiring and promotions. This would be a very meaningful change to our status within City government.

Third, I would like to see a City Hall that promotes and emphasizes the importance of independent oversight as a component of delivering City services equitably and efficiently for all New Yorkers. I would like the City's senior leaders to explicitly encourage open lines of communication between DOI and City agencies and City Hall. As I've said, I don't agree that independent oversight means an arm's length relationship between the oversight entity and the agencies, senior officials, and elected officials that the oversight entity is responsible for. Independent oversight means independence in the exercise of decision-making and factfinding, not isolation. Independent oversight can include collaborating with agencies to give guidance on risk areas and the development of policies and procedures to address those areas, before they materialize into an allegation of misconduct. Consulting with an oversight agency on these topics does not give the agency or its employees immunity for future problems, and it does not guarantee success, but it provides an opportunity for oversight agencies to assist proactively in measures that may reduce the risk of corruption, waste and abuse. Independent oversight can and should include regular discussions with agency leadership and City Hall about how recommendations for policy and procedural reform can be prioritized from a budget perspective and implemented in a cost-effective way. Independent oversight can include collaboration on how to gather and proactively query and compare the vast amounts of data that the City maintains, across numerous agencies, to expose waste, identify cost-saving opportunities, and search for red flags indicative of fraud or other misconduct that can form the basis for oversight investigations.

During my tenure, of course, there was a significant distance between DOI and certain senior members of City Hall, particularly those under investigation, which was entirely appropriate given the work that we were doing. But that distance limited our ability to pursue some of these initiatives that I've just described. And my sense is that – while this was by no means true of the majority -- there were influential figures in this Administration who did not in fact welcome oversight, or value transparency and who did not view DOI as a partner in a successful, efficient and well-functioning City, but as an outsider, an unavoidable difficulty, to be kept at arm's length.

I want to share with you an anecdote that contributed to that sense. The Mayor held weekly "off topic" press availabilities, where he and members of his senior team took questions on all subjects from the press. At one, a reporter asked about a pilot AI chatbot intended to answer various questions from City employees that, based on the reporter's queries, had provided inaccurate advice about conflicts of interest. The reporter already had written a story about the inaccuracies. A senior official scolded her, stating that it would have been better for the reporter to bring the problems directly to City Hall, so that City Hall could have corrected them, and then City Hall could have shared publicly that the pilot program had revealed problems that had been fixed, giving the reporter credit for flagging the issue. Of course, that is not how a free press works, and it is not how independent oversight works. We do not whisper problems in the administration's ear for "credit" and so that problems can be quietly fixed and only then disclosed to the public.

I fully understand that public criticism is difficult, and sometimes wrongheaded or unfair. Relatively early in my tenure DOI was contacted by reporters working on an unflattering story about misconduct of certain DOI investigators, misconduct that allegedly was strikingly similar to criminal conduct in certain charged cases that those same investigators had worked on. Rather than spin the facts or run from the story, DOI did a quick internal investigation and shared the results with the reporters, including certain problematic conduct by our own investigators and policy gaps in our own policies that the agency addressed. We also pushed back hard on what we viewed as an unfounded and incorrect assumption that the alleged misconduct was widespread or threatened the charged cases. After lengthy conversations with the reporters, we felt that the story they issued generally got it right. The way DOI handled that situation provides a rough blueprint for the kind of transparency and openness to oversight that I think we should ask of the agencies and government administrations that we oversee, because that is what positive change requires.

I recognize that tension between the oversight agency and the entity it oversees is an enduring feature of the work that we do, but I think government should aspire to truly embrace its oversight agencies,

to seek their counsel on critical policy questions within the oversight agency's areas of expertise, to acknowledge problems transparently and to consider feasible solutions to fix them.

Now particularly in the current environment, where conducting independent oversight can place your job at risk, a proposal that government willingly subject itself to independent oversight, to public criticism, and to reforms that may be burdensome or costly may seem unrealistic. But if we aspire to a government that is ambitious in seeking to improve the lives of its constituents, then we should aspire to one that is fully committed to transparency and to robust independent oversight, because oversight's core mission is to make government function better, and to deliver for the people that it was elected to serve, with efficiency and integrity.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City's corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI's strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

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