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## **N.J. attorney general says State Police not to blame for tossing activist from Senate hearing**

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New Jersey's attorney general concluded that State Police acted appropriately when they forcibly removed an activist from a high-profile state Senate hearing late last year.

Sue Altman, head of New Jersey Working Families, was dragged out of the Statehouse by troopers in November, before South Jersey powerbroker George E. Norcross III testified about the state's controversial multi-billion-dollar tax break program. Altman has criticized how Norcross has benefited from tax breaks.

"There is no credible evidence to indicate that the State Troopers involved in the removal were motivated by political considerations," Gurbir Grewal wrote Tuesday to the commission that oversees the Statehouse.

"Troopers who removed Ms. Altman did so because they believed that she was being disruptive during the hearing and refusing to respond to the instructions of law enforcement," he said.

The letter was first reported by Politico.

However, Grewal added that the capitol "lacks clear, well-defined rules about what actions constitute disorderly or disruptive conduct." He recommended that State Police meet with the State Capitol Joint Management Commission to clarify what was allowed.

In a statement, acting Gov. Sheila Oliver said she welcomed the suggestions.

"As a former Speaker of the State Assembly, I know how crucial it is for the public to be able to participate in our legislative process," she said. "We expect the State Capitol Joint Management Commission ... to establish a process for members of the public to share their experiences and concerns so that we can strengthen public confidence in our democratic process."

Grewal also asked the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office to dismiss the disorderly conduct charge against Altman, despite having "serious concerns" with Altman's initial refusal to leave.

Altman said she had no ill will toward the officers.

“I have never really been overly concerned about the particular troopers,” Altman wrote in an email. “I’m much more interested in the overarching problems with that hearing, specifically how members of the public were shut out.”

Altman and others who attended have said that some Norcross critics appeared to be arbitrarily kept out.

Details about who was allowed in remain in dispute, the letter said, although it acknowledged that groups have voiced similar concerns during other events.

Norcross has denied that he had anything to do with Altman’s removal.

At least two investigations were launched after the incident, and Grewal’s letter represents a portion of the findings. Grewal previously said he would fight lawmakers who wanted to see the full review, to protect the integrity of internal investigations.

A representative for state Senate Democrats did not immediately respond to a question about whether lawmakers would be placated by this summary. State Police did not immediately respond to a request for comment.