

New York Agrees to Settle Ex-Cuomo Aide's Harassment Claims for \$450,000

The former executive aide, Brittany Commisso, accused Andrew M. Cuomo of groping her when he was governor. The state did not admit wrongdoing.



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By Grace Ashford

Reporting from Albany, N.Y.

July 18, 2025

New York State has agreed to pay \$450,000 to settle claims from a woman who accused Andrew M. Cuomo of groping her in 2020, when he was the governor and she was an executive aide, according to a settlement document reviewed by The New York Times.

The settlement, with Brittany Commisso, is the second one the state has made this year in connection with Mr. Cuomo's treatment of women while in office. Mr. Cuomo resigned in 2021 amid accusations he harassed 11 women, including Ms. Commisso. He is now running for mayor of New York City.

Under the terms of the agreement, which will need a judge's approval, Ms. Commisso would drop all claims against the state, including an accusation that she was retaliated against after coming forward about her experience. She also agreed not to seek employment with the executive chamber through 2030. The deal does not include any admission of wrongdoing on the part of the state or Mr. Cuomo.

Mariann Wang, a lawyer for Ms. Commisso, called the settlement "a complete vindication of her claims."

It is a blow to the former governor, who has been trying to reinvent himself as a friendly and trustworthy figure as he struggles to mount a political comeback. A representative for Mr. Cuomo, Rich Azzopardi, said that the state had agreed to settle the suit over Mr. Cuomo's objections.

This week, Mr. Cuomo announced that he would continue his bid for mayor as an independent after losing the Democratic nomination to Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani, a 33-year-old democratic socialist from Queens.

Mr. Cuomo, 67, has acknowledged having made mistakes on the campaign trail, including underestimating Mr. Mamdani. But he continues to vehemently deny any sexual misconduct, despite findings from the New York State attorney general, the State Assembly and the U.S. Department of Justice.

In an interview with The New York Times published last month, he insisted that his only mistake was having resigned under pressure.

Anthony Hoglebe, a spokesman for Gov. Kathy Hochul, said the settlement would allow the state to "minimize further costs to taxpayers." The state has already spent millions defending Mr. Cuomo against harassment accusations.

In a statement, lawyers for Mr. Cuomo, Rita Glavin and Theresa Trzaskoma, called Ms. Commisso's case a "nuisance suit."

"The settlement is not a vindication," they added. "It is capitulation to avoid the truth."

Ms. Commisso began working closely with Mr. Cuomo in late 2019, managing phone calls and other tasks. She told investigators for the attorney general that Mr. Cuomo commented on her appearance, telling her to show "some leg" and saying that she "looked good" for being a mother. Soon, she said, Mr. Cuomo was initiating hugs that went on for too long.

She said that during a November 2020 meeting with Mr. Cuomo at the Executive Mansion, he slipped his hand into her blouse and groped her. Mr. Cuomo has denied this.

Ms. Commisso was one of five women whose accusations led to criminal investigations by various district attorneys. Prosecutors declined to move forward on any of the cases but found most of the accusers, including Ms. Commisso, to be credible.

Mr. Cuomo has tried to put all of that behind him as he runs for mayor, pitching himself as an experienced manager whom the city can trust.

Ms. Hochul, who served as Mr. Cuomo's lieutenant governor before he resigned, has thus far avoided making any endorsements in the mayor's race.

Asked on Friday what she thought of Mr. Cuomo's third-party campaign, Ms. Hochul smiled and said, "Anybody has the right to run any race they choose to."

Grace Ashford covers New York government and politics for The Times.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 15 of the New York edition with the headline: Settlement Poses Setback For Cuomo In Mayor Run