



July 8, 2025

The Honorable Leticia James  
Attorney Gener, State of New York  
The Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Attorney General James,

I write to request that your office open a formal investigation into a disturbing violation of First Amendment rights by Congressman Mike Lawler and his staff. According to a story in the Journal News, a member of Congressman Lawler's congressional staff infiltrated a private Signal group of local constituents and activists. This government official allegedly encouraged the group to disrupt Lawler's Town Hall meetings. This appears to violate and manipulate the freedom of association and political expression that is guaranteed in the First Amendment. It also seems to be an example of illegal surveillance as the individuals on this Signal chat had a reasonable expectation of privacy.

The very fact that a government official hid their identity and spied on constituents who hold opposing views is deeply troubling. Further, this staff member allegedly attempted to stoke disruption and tension at one of Lawler's town halls, which could have endangered attendees and law enforcement.

Congressman Lawler has a disturbing history of shutting down voices who are critical of his actions in Congress. At previous town halls, he has barred

journalists from entering and even forcibly removed individuals for voicing their disagreements with him. This all occurred in the context of the very serious attacks on the first amendment happening across the country by President Donald Trump. To be clear, members of the public are free to associate with whomever they choose and are guaranteed the right to hold elected officials accountable by voicing dissent in a peaceful manner. To that end, I am requesting this investigation in the interest of protecting these freedoms and ensuring that government officials who illegally surveil and intimidate those who oppose them see consequences for their actions.

I respectfully request that your office investigate these apparent violations of First Amendment rights. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely

Effie Phillips-Staley