

ALBANY — Former state Inspector General Letizia Tagliafierro, who served in several ethics and investigative roles during former Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration, died Tuesday after a long battle with cancer.

Her death was confirmed by Cuomo spokesman Richard Azzopardi.

Tagliafierro, 50, began her career in the public sector with four years as a legislative assistant to state Sen. Serphin Maltese, R-Queens, and eight years as an assistant district attorney in Erie County.

In 2007, the Albany Law School graduate was named as a special counsel to the commissioner of the state Division of Criminal Justice Services before joining then-state Attorney General Cuomo's staff in his Buffalo office. After Cuomo's election as governor, Tagliafierro was appointed director of intergovernmental affairs.

She then moved to the newly created state Joint Commission on Public Ethics, first serving as its director of investigations before rising in 2013 to the top staff post of executive director. Through most of its decade of operation ending last summer, JCOPE faced criticism that it was too influenced by Cuomo at both the staff and commissioner level.

Tagliafierro left JCOPE in 2015 to serve as deputy commissioner at the state Department of Taxation and Finance, where she led the criminal investigations division, and the following year rejoined the Executive Chamber as Cuomo's special counsel for public safety.

In January 2019 — just weeks after Cuomo's election to a third term he would not complete — Tagliafierro replaced Catherine Leahy-Scott as state inspector general, giving her leadership over the office that investigates alleged wrongdoing by public employees as well as private entities doing business with the state.

Tagliafierro had only been in office a few weeks when she was obliged to recuse herself from an investigation into the report of an illegal leak of confidential information from a JCOPE executive session that Cuomo had allegedly brought up in a conversation with state Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie. The Times Union reported in November 2019 that the inspector general's office never sought to question Cuomo or Heastie in its probe, which had concluded with a brief letter to JCOPE stating that the leak had not been substantiated.

Tagliafierro's [resignation](#) in September 2021 came less than a month after Cuomo's exit and two weeks after a majority of JCOPE's commissioners voted to ask state Attorney General Letitia James to investigate the conduct of the inspector general's office in the leak probe.

Azzopardi described Tagliafierro as "a public servant through and through, whose intelligence and legal savvy was only matched by her warmth and sense of humor."

Details on a memorial service were not immediately available Wednesday.

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## Former state Inspector General Letizia Tagliafierro dies

Longtime Cuomo administration official resigned weeks after his exit facing questions about watchdog office's handling of alleged JCOPE leak

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Letizia Tagliafierro listens during a meeting of the state Joint Commission on Public Ethics in October 2013. She served as the watchdog panel's investigations chief and executive director.

John Carl D'Annibale