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March 15, 2021

Hon. Charles E. Schumer
U.S. Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Kirsten Gillibrand
U.S. Senator from New York
478 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Vaccination Responsibility

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Senator Gillibrand:

The shocking stories in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* regarding phone calls made by New York's "vaccine czar" to county officials to gauge their loyalty to Governor Cuomo in the midst of multiple scandals demands immediate intervention and action on your part. Specifically, we are urging you to have Federal government officials take immediate action to assume control of the State's vaccination distribution program, working directly with local officials to ensure an equitable and efficient process.

Governor Cuomo's "vaccine czar" -- longtime Cuomo political loyalist and "enforcer" Larry Schwartz -- is the key man responsible for interfacing with local county government officials as they struggle to procure sufficient quantities of vaccines in order to get them into the arms of our local citizens. At the same time, according to published accounts, Schwartz has now also been personally contacting county government officials to gauge their political support for the Governor at a time when this Administration is facing multiple scandals and state and federal investigations.

It would be a gross understatement to suggest that having the same man carry out both roles simultaneously is a situation fraught with profound moral and ethical conflicts. What's more, the legality of this arrangement is also highly questionable. In fact, one of the contacted county government officials has already filed a complaint with the Public Integrity Unit of the State Attorney General's Office.

At a minimum, the fact that these conversations have even been allowed to take place is unconscionable, and displays an arrogant, reckless disregard for basic common sense, decency and propriety. Clearly, the conflicts, pressures and impossible choices that these local government officials have been forced to deal with by the Governor and his loyalists is hard to imagine.

By many accounts, even prior to these explosive revelations the State's vaccination roll-out and distribution has been deeply troubled and mismanaged from the very beginning. Now, it has been corrupted in an almost unimaginable way.

It is worth noting that the Governor's appointment of a non-governmental official to carry out this vitally important, public health role was always a matter of real concern to the members of our Senate Minority Conference, due to the challenges such an arrangement created in terms of exercising appropriate government oversight and accountability. Once again, we believe this speaks to an Executive Chamber that has grown increasingly out-of-control. Similar to the effort to lie about and cover-up thousands of nursing home deaths, we are now witnessing an Administration that has become so arrogant and reckless, that it now poses a very real danger to the public health of New Yorkers.

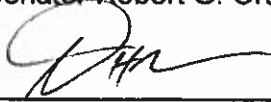
As you know, the need to get vaccines distributed as quickly and widely as possible is absolutely urgent, especially in the state that has been the hardest hit by this deadly pandemic. With this in mind, we are urging you to have Federal government officials take immediate action to assume control of the State's vaccination distribution program and work directly with local County Executives.

Senators, your immediate action on this matter is not only crucial, it is both literally and figuratively a matter of life and death for untold thousands of New Yorkers and their families.

Sincerely,



Senator Robert G. Ort



Senator Anthony H. Palumbo



Senator Patty Ritchie



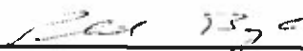
Senator Sue Serino



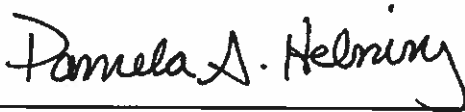
Senator Fred Akshar



Senator George M. Borrello



Senator Phil Boyle



Senator Pamela Helming



Senator Joseph A. Griffo



Senator Mario Mattera



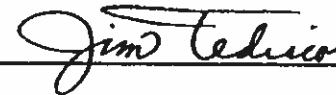
Senator Daniel G. Stec



Senator Alexis Weik



Senator Edward Rath III



Senator James Tedisco



Senator Daphne Jordan



Senator Peter Oberacker



Senator Thomas F. O'Mara



Senator Mike Martucci

cc: Hon. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
NY Congressional Delegation
NYS Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins