



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Tedisco

## Tedisco to Governor: Help Beleaguered St. Clare's Hospital Pensioners Who've Been Asked to Volunteer as COVID-19 Relief Workers

SENATOR JIM TEDISCO March 25, 2020

Senator Jim Tedisco (R,C,I,REF-Glenville) today formally requested that the Governor use his executive authority to provide some economic relief to the 1,100 dedicated former St. Clare's Hospital retirees who he has sent a letter (attached) to requesting their assistance in returning to work to treat those seriously ill with the coronavirus.

The St. Clare's Hospital pensioners have been dealing with their own economic crisis for well over a year since they were notified by the St. Clare's Pension Fund Corporation that their retirements would be diminished or outright eliminated. Tedisco first made this request of the Governor's Office this past weekend during a COVID-19 Response conference call and is now following up with a formal letter (see attached).

"As we work together to defeat the coronavirus, many New Yorkers are not only worried about their own health and that of their loved ones, but also their economic futures due to job loss. We need to continue to work across party lines to help our fellow citizens in the days, weeks and months ahead. Meanwhile, there are 1,100 New Yorkers, many of whom are my constituents, who have been coping with economic uncertainty and desperation for over a year with no end in sight – the dedicated professionals who worked at the former St.

Clare's Hospital in Schenectady who cared for some of the most vulnerable and saw their pensions evaporate in the snap of a finger through no fault of their own," said Senator Jim Tedisco.

"I appreciate the tough job our Governor has right now in one of our state's darkest hours and I will continue to help in our state's united response to the coronavirus. It's ironic that many of our St. Clare's retirees are now being asked to suit-up and join the fight one more time, when in many cases, are on the verge of losing everything before this current national crisis occurred. I know the Governor has got a lot on his plate, but as we wait for the Attorney General to take action and the Court to weigh in, I respectfully ask him to use his executive authority to provide a measure of relief for our dedicated St. Clare's retirees so they can better weather this financial storm," said Senator Tedisco.

"The 1,100 St. Clare's Pensioners have been experiencing economic and emotional stress for the past 15 months. The abrupt loss of their pension has affected them physically and emotionally. Add that to the shock of the severe changes caused by the coronavirus and you have 1,100 people suffering losses that are unthinkable. When Governor Cuomo sent a letter out to all the healthcare workers and asked them to step up and help, it was like 'salt in the wound!' Many of us are in the high risk category of being senior citizens and that title tends to come with health issues, which makes it impossible for us to rejoin the healthcare field. We are saddened to find that the Governor ignored all of our pleas for help over the past year but quickly found us when he needed our help," said Mary Hartshorne, Chair of the St. Clare's Pension Recovery Alliance.

Among the ideas Senator Tedisco is suggesting the Governor could implement to help the St. Clare's pensioners during the COVID-19 crisis:

- Double the STAR property tax relief credit;

- Freeze mortgage payments and tax credit for rent for St. Clare's pensioners during the crisis;
- Retired Healthcare Staff COVID-19 Volunteer Tax Credit;
- Allow St. Clare's pensioners who own a business to keep their sales tax revenue;
- Reduce eligibility requirements for the EPIC pharmacy assistance program;
- Lower premiums for retirees to defray the costs of home health aides;
- Tax credit for the cost of groceries, medical supplies and cleaning products;
- Waive tele-health co-pays;
- Exempt pensioners from the NYSERDA Thermostat Rebate Program \$75 new energy efficient thermostat cost;
- Waive all DMV fees for one year; and
- Waive OGS contracting fees with the state for pensioners.

Previously:

St. Clare's Hospital was closed a decade ago by a requirement of the state's Berger Commission in its mission to right-size New York's health care facilities, and its operations were absorbed by Ellis Medicine. At the time, the state paid \$58.7 million to cover transition costs, including \$28 million to cover the anticipated needs of the St. Clare's Pension Fund. Unfortunately, for reasons not yet fully identified, that was not enough to cover the fund's pension costs. Since federal law permits a religious exemption, the St. Clare's pension fund has no benefit guarantee insurance.

In December, Senator Tedisco provided the Attorney General's office with a startling document that he received from an anonymous source that says the "St. Clare's Hospital defined benefit plan is underfunded by \$47 million as of December 31, 2006," and not the \$28 million originally allocated by the state in the consolidation agreement. The document raised significant questions about what happened to the money that was meant to go to the retirements of the St. Clare's Pensioners.

Last month, the New York State Attorney General's Office told Senator Tedisco, they are looking into both the dissolution of the St. Clare's Corporation and a separate "intensive" and "as thorough as you can hope for" investigation into what happened to the Pension Fund. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, the Attorney General said they were hopeful of an announcement in the next month regarding the investigation.