



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara renews call for independent investigation of COVID-19 nursing home crisis

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 15, 2020

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**Elmira, N.Y., May 14**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today renewed his call for an independent investigation into the COVID-19 crisis continuing to unfold within state-regulated nursing homes and New York's response to the tragedy.

Earlier today, several of O'Mara's colleagues from western New York requested the state Senate committees on Health, and Investigations and Government Operations, and the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, to initiate an independent investigation.

O'Mara said, "The front lines of this nursing home crisis in Steuben County and other hot spots throughout New York State have led to important shifts in state policies, but it has also highlighted the frustration at the local level with the response of the Cuomo administration and overall state policies. We repeatedly called for aggressive and decisive actions by the state Health Department to test, isolate, and prevent spread, but kept running into the roadblocks of existing state policies and directives. An independent investigation is warranted and necessary for the families who have lost loved ones, the caregivers putting themselves at risk, and to ensure better and safer policies moving forward."

Until last week, state policy allowed COVID-positive nursing home employees to continue reporting to work as long as they did not display symptoms. Another now-revised state Department of Health (DOH) directive forced nursing homes to accept COVID-positive patients. Questions have also been raised over whether nursing home staffs were provided adequate personal protective equipment in the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Some nursing home operators are now saying they can't comply with the latest state directive to test employees for COVID-19 twice a week.

Overall, the Cuomo administration continues to come under criticism for the COVID-19 crisis in nursing homes, where, according to recent state reporting, deaths now total nearly 5,000.

While an investigation has been launched by the state's Attorney General and the DOH, O'Mara and legislative colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, question the independence of that investigation since DOH is directly involved in creating the directives being questioned.

In addition to an independent investigation, Senate Republicans also recently called for an immediate change in policy to create regionally based specialty long-term care facilities for COVID-19 positive nursing home residents.

Read and watch more from *WETM-TV*, "**O'Mara renews call for an independent investigation into NY's COVID-19 nursing home crisis**"