



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## SENATE REPUBLICAN CONFERENCE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS HOLD LISTENING SESSION ON FAILED VACCINE ROLLOUT

SUSAN SERINO January 18, 2021

| ISSUE: **CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC; COVID-19; VACCINE DISTRIBUTION**



**Senator Ed Rath, Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Local Government**, today convened a virtual roundtable with **members of the Senate Republican Conference** and **local officials** from various regions of the state to hear concerns and ongoing issues with Governor Cuomo's failed vaccine rollout.

Topics raised in the discussion today included: accessibility to vaccinations sites, particularly for seniors and in rural communities; a lack of information, both for the public and local

governments regarding the process; confusion over the eligibility criteria; and the massive website and phone system overload that caused further frustration and confusion for those trying to be vaccinated.

“This is a critical dialogue – we need to hear the input from our country governments. Each county faces a different set of challenges and brings a different perspective. We need to work together to find answers and get New Yorkers vaccinated,” **said Senator Ed Rath.**

“New York State’s vaccine rollout thus far has been nothing short of a disaster and has highlighted why Republicans in the State Senate have pushed so vigorously to restore balance to our state’s government. With something as important as the rollout of a vaccine, there must be legislative input and oversight, and currently there is no way to hold the governor and his administration accountable for any mistakes. This task is too crucial to public health to be left in the hands of one individual, and the State Legislature must have its power restored,” **said Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt.**

“My office is being flooded with calls and emails from residents – mostly seniors – desperate for help securing a vaccine after they have run into multiple dead ends. It is clear the state was wholly unprepared to effectively handle the vaccine rollout, resulting in lagging distribution, broken communications systems, and thousands of computer illiterate seniors being left behind. Instead of overburdening local governments with red tape and threatening fines, today’s roundtable reinforced the fact that it is time for the state to focus on: providing the support local governments need to effectively take over the process, increasing working registration options for eligible seniors, and drastically improving communication with anxious New Yorkers,” **said Senator Sue Serino, ranking member of the Senate Aging Committee.**

“We must ensure the vaccine distribution program is not only efficient, but fair to everyone who wants to participate. In addition to seniors, health care workers, first responders, and teachers, the vaccination plan should include the so-called forgotten frontline workers, including public transit employees, highway workers and those who provide other essential services. Federal, state, and local leaders must work together to protect the health and safety of residents,” **said Senator Patrick Gallivan, ranking member of the Senate Standing Committee on Health.**

**Other members of the Republican Conference** participating included: **Senators George Borrello, Pam Helming, Peter Oberacker, Alexis Weik, and Tom O’Mara.**

The listening session was a collaborative and productive discussion about how local and state officials can work together moving forward to address the many issues caused by the chaotic vaccine rollout.

“The State’s COVID-19 vaccine rollout has been disappointing, to say the least, raising the hopes of millions of seniors statewide only to dash those hopes by delivering a minute fraction of the doses needed. For years, counties throughout New York have been mandated to formulate mass-scale vaccination plans for just such a scenario, and we implore the state to allow us to employ our plans to more efficiently and effectively get shots into the arms of residents who so desperately seek this life-saving vaccine. We will continue to advocate for our residents and remain willing to work with Albany to ensure every New Yorker who wants a vaccination can obtain one in a timely manner,” **said Marc Molinaro, Dutchess County Executive.**

“Thank you to Senator Rath for organizing this event and including Genesee County. This is an extremely important discussion and I am glad Senator Rath is asking rural counties for their unique perspective,” **said L. Matthew Landers, Genesee County Manager/ Budget Officer.**

“It would be helpful if some of the funding from the CARES Act that several counties have already received could be released by the Governor to all counties. That funding is needed to help continuation of COVID testing efforts, and would certainly be helpful in the rollout of the vaccine program,” **said Jack Marren, Chairman of the Ontario County Board of Supervisors.**

“The coordination between all levels of government on this mass undertaking is of paramount importance, especially understanding the rolls that everyone must play. As a county leader, I am confident with the distribution plan we have in place and the fact we have been getting shots in arms. The real issue, which will apparently be the issue for weeks and months to come, is going to be far more people have been made eligible for the vaccine than the supply can support,” **said Becky Wydysh, Chairman of the Niagara County Legislature.**

Other local officials that participated include: Daniel Stapleton, Public Health Director, Niagara County; Mary Ellen Odell and Thomas Feighery, Putnam County Executive and Deputy Executive; Paul Pettit, Public Health Director, Genesee & Orleans Counties; Richard Updegrove, Niagara County Manager; Jack Wheeler, Stueben County Manager; Lynne Johnson, Chairman, Orleans County Legislature; Vincent Azzarelli, Director of Public Information, Stueben County; and Steve Brew, Monroe County Legislator.

“I want to thank my colleagues in the Senate, as well as all the local officials who took the time to share their experiences and frustrations with us. Today was the first step in an ongoing dialog, and I look forward to working collaboratively with our elected officials at all levels to address the issues that were raised today and ensure any New Yorker who wants a vaccine can get one,” **said Senator Ed Rath.**

###