



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

SERINO LEADS ONGOING PUSH FOR ANSWERS, ACCOUNTABILITY IN NY NURSING HOME DEATHS

SUSAN SERINO February 3, 2021

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HYDE PARK, NY—With NYS Health Commissioner Howard Zucker delaying his scheduled appearance before lawmakers today, Senator Sue Serino and her colleagues are demanding the Legislature’s Supermajority issue the subpoenas necessary to launch a full investigation into the state’s handling of the COVID-19 crisis in New York’s nursing homes.

In light of the Governor's recent 'who cares' comments, family members who lost loved ones in nursing homes and assisted living facilities to COVID-19 joined Serino's virtual press conference to send a powerful reminder to Albany politicians about the human toll the state's failed policies have taken on New York families. Participants included famed Meteorologist and Victim's Advocate, Janice Dean, who lost both of her in-laws to the virus, and Cindy Lizzi and Ted and Phil Minissale who participated in the investigation that led to the Attorney General's bombshell report after losing their loved ones.

Republican members of the Senate and Assembly joined Serino at the event to offer a number of procedural steps the Democratic members of either Legislative Chamber can take immediately to help get families like these the answers they deserve. Serino, who serves as the Ranking Member of the Senate's Aging Committee, even took the steps necessary to draft a legislative subpoena, offering it to any Majority Committee Chair who would be willing to issue it to launch a full investigation.

"If any of my colleagues in the Senate Majority are serious about issuing a subpoena and launching a thorough investigation into the COVID crisis in our nursing homes, all they have to do is sign and send it," said Senator Serino, Ranking Member of the Senate's Aging Committee. "The Senate Majority has the power to get the answers so many grieving families are after, but to date, they have chosen not to use it. With real lives on the line, the Attorney General's report makes it painfully clear that we absolutely cannot afford to wait another day—let alone weeks—for the Health Commissioner to be ready to appear before us at a budget hearing. When you have the power to make a difference, it is not enough to say you will 'consider' the issuance of a subpoena, or the holding of a hearing, you have to set politics aside, do what is right and take action. We will not stop pushing until New Yorkers get the answers they deserve."

Janice Dean, who has become an outspoken voice for justice for grieving New York families, said, "Our families have been waiting for almost a year for answers as to why our loved ones were put in harm's way without warning and why our governor has done everything he can to cover up his deadly mistakes. We deserve answers for our families and to ensure this never happens again to anyone else's family."

Cindy Lizzi, Ted Minissale and Phil Minissale: "Our family has suffered tremendous loss, and since our mother Agnes passed away, we have waited for the truth to come out. So many families have gone through this – losing a loved one because questionable decisions were made that put patients in danger and

impacted people's lives. People need to own their mistakes, and there needs to be accountability for the families, like ours, who have lost so much."

"One thing Governor Cuomo's not going to be getting an Emmy Award for, is transparency, as the Attorney General's report has begun to lift the Administration's veil of secrecy that was hiding the real number of nursing home residents who died from COVID-19. Clearly, the Governor's six-month cover-up and refusal to give us these numbers shows he felt they mattered so he could hide any blame. It's time the Majority stop covering for Cuomo and either issue subpoenas or pass my bipartisan legislation with Majority Democratic Member Ron Kim, Senator Sue Serino and several other Democrats and Republicans for an independent investigation with subpoena power to obtain the metrics and data from the state Health Department so we can get justice and answers for the families who lost loved ones and help prevent something like this from happening again," said Senator Jim Tedisco (R,C,-Glenville).

Senator Tom O'Mara, Ranking Member of the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee, said, "We will not stop in this effort. COVID-19's terrible toll on the elderly makes it all the more vital that we fully understand what has happened, as straightforwardly as it takes, and with as much toughness as it demands. It is time for the Senate Democrat Majority to stop protecting Governor Cuomo. Their failure to immediately issue subpoenas and demand testimony from the Cuomo administration completely abandons legislative responsibility. It makes the Senate Democrats complicit in this tragedy."

"The attorney general's bombshell report is the first step to finally getting some answers for the thousands of families who lost loved ones in the state's nursing homes," said Assembly Minority Leader Will Barclay (R,C,I-Pulaski). "The administration must take full responsibility for the role the March 25 directive played in the spread of the virus in these facilities and admit their culpability. I stand by my colleagues and demand a thorough and comprehensive investigation—the people of New York deserve full transparency. Today, we say, 'enough is enough'. It is time the governor's emergency powers are rescinded. The welfare of the state can no longer be left in the hands of one man; legislative oversight must be restored."

"After months of demanding answers from the governor's office and the state's department of health, we are just now getting a better picture of the devastation that occurred in nursing homes this past year," said Assemblyman Kevin Byrne, (R,C,I,SAM,ROS-Mahopac), ranking Minority Member on the Assembly Committee on Health. "The recent report released by the attorney general's office exposed what the 2nd floor has tried to ignore for over 6 months. We've held bipartisan hearings, forums, and appealed to various government representatives in our efforts to obtain the unvarnished truth. While the AG's report validated the concerns we've expressed for the better part of a year, even the AG's report did not include all the nursing home information requested. The AG's report only strengthens our calls for an independent investigation into the state's response to COVID19 in our elder care facilities, including the

decision to implement the controversial March 25th directive. We need all the facts, and any effort to willfully cover-up wrongdoing that may have led to additional harm and death in our state's nursing homes must be exposed. Only then can we hold people accountable and give families that lost loved ones the answers and justice they so desperately seek. Governor Cuomo and his surrogates can try to paint this effort as "political", but the demand for answers has been anything but. People of all parties, backgrounds, and cultures have been impacted by this deadly virus. We will not stop until we have real answers for these grieving families."

[A full recording of the event can be viewed by clicking here.](#)