



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Anthony H. Palumbo

## Senator's Blast Cuomo's Continued OPWDD Cover-Up

ANTHONY H. PALUMBO March 17, 2021

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Response to Senators' Inquiry Doesn't Address Questions; Deadly Directive Remains in Effect

New York State Senators Anthony Palumbo (R-C, New Suffolk), Mike Martucci (R-C-I, New Hampton), James Tedisco (R-C, Glenville) and Fred Akshar (R-C-I-Ref, Binghamton), today blasted the response they received to their February 26th letter regarding an April 10th order to require group homes to accept COVID-positive residents -- as well as the state's overall response to COVID in groups homes -- as insufficient, incomplete, and disingenuous.

In a March 16th letter, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) claimed the number of residents that have died from COVID since the start of the pandemic is 548 people. Also included in their response was testimony delivered to the Assembly in September that logs 465 COVID-related deaths.

Unbelievably, the April 10th order that likely contributed to these deaths is still in place. As a result, since September at least an estimated 100 more vulnerable developmentally disabled people have perished at the hands of this ghastly order. It is impossible to verify that the provided data on infections and deaths is thorough and up-to-date because the State Agency did not provide information on when and where the infections and deaths occurred.

Furthermore, the Senators' letter from February 26th requested all communications between OPWDD, the Department of Health, and the Governor's office. The response didn't contain a single communication.

“OPWDD continues to stonewall our attempts to obtain up-to-date information of COVID-19 deaths in group homes and of caretakers during the pandemic. These refusals, combined with their callous decision to keep the disastrous April 10th directive is a continuation of this administration's failure to protect New York's most vulnerable residents during the pandemic. We demand that the April 10th directive be rescinded and deserve real answers for the hundreds of families who lost loved ones to COVID-19 in group homes for the disabled,” said Senator Palumbo, member of the Senate Committees on Mental Health and Investigations and Government Operations.

“OPWDD continues to cover up for Andrew Cuomo, and Intellectually and Developmentally disabled residents of our group homes continue to be at risk as a result. What in the name of

conscience will it take for OPWDD to come clean, repeal this order, and blow the lid off the Cuomo cover-up?” said Senator Martucci, ranking member of the Senate Disabilities Committee.

“A lack of transparency and obfuscation has become a sad hallmark of the Cuomo Administration in their constant campaign to cover-up the release of facts that might be damaging to the Governor’s false narrative he laid out in his book of being ‘Andrew Cuomo: The Covid Slayer.’ My Senate Republican colleagues and I are demanding that the Cuomo Administration and the OPWDD release the full data and all their communications about infections and deaths during the pandemic of some of our most vulnerable citizens in group homes,” said Senator Tedisco, ranking member of the Senate Committee of Mental Health.

“The people of New York deserve answers, yet this administration continues its attempts to cover up the truth. This tactic didn’t work for the disastrous nursing home situation and we will continue fighting until this data is made available to all. New York’s most vulnerable residents and their families deserve nothing less,” said Senator Akshar, member of the Senate Disabilities Committee.

Attached are copies of the original letter to OPWDD, yesterday’s response, and today’s letter to the Chair of the Senate Investigations Committee.