



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

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SUSAN SERINO May 3, 2022

| ISSUE: [COVID-19 NURSING HOME DEATHS; INVESTIGATION](#)

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Health Agency Under Cuomo ‘Misled the Public’ on Nursing Home Deaths

The New York State Health Department presented nursing home data that concealed the deaths of 4,100 people, according to an audit by the state comptroller.

March 15, 2022, New York Times

ALBANY, NY—An agenda for the State Senate’s Aging Committee meeting today included a bill that would establish an office for an ‘Age-Friendly New York’ under the Executive Branch to advise state agencies on developing “age-friendly” policies for older New Yorkers. State Senator Sue Serino, the Committee’s Ranking Member, organized a presentation in response to argue that in order to be truly “age-friendly,” the state must undergo a full pandemic review that includes an independent investigation into COVID-19 nursing home

deaths.

Bill Hammond, Senior Fellow for Health Policy at the nonpartisan Empire Center for Public Policy, and Janice Dean, Fox News Senior Meteorologist turned prolific advocate for families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 in New York's nursing homes after losing her own in-laws, presented before the Committee to help make the case for a full review.

“Only two years ago, it was the New York Governor’s Office that played a role in implementing a policy that put vulnerable seniors directly in harm’s way when it released the deadly March 25th Order that required nursing homes to admit COVID-positive residents,” said Senator Serino. “Without a full, independent review of the state’s handling of the pandemic, how can New Yorkers trust the Executive to develop effective ‘age-friendly’ policies? The Senate’s Aging Committee is supposed to protect and empower older New Yorkers, yet its inaction on this issue has been glaring. With only 15 session days left, and clear bipartisan support for an independent investigation, now is the time to right that wrong and work together to make it happen so that this terrible tragedy is never repeated.”

“As we move into our final month of the legislative session, there is no goal more important than finally advancing legislation to authorize an independent, bipartisan investigation into the state’s disastrous pandemic response in its nursing homes,” said Senator George Borrello, member of the Senate Aging Committee. “New York State’s history has countless examples where our state demonstrated true leadership, particularly when it comes to protecting our most vulnerable citizens. That proud legacy is being tarnished by the Majority’s persistent refusal to fully examine and learn from this tragic chapter. Grieving families deserve accountability and New Yorkers deserve to know that such deadly mistakes will not be repeated.”

“As a meteorologist, my job is to help forecast storms, and when a hurricane or blizzard hits New York, there is always an after action review to try and learn from what happened. Why aren’t we doing the same for the over 15,000 seniors that were taken from us without warning?” asked Janice Dean.

“Members of the Aging Committee are in charge of protecting and empowering our seniors. I will not forget that the Committee had the power to issue subpoenas to find out what happened two years ago as the dead were being piled into storage trucks, but chose not to. While we cannot bring those precious lives back, it is not too late to do the right thing in their memory. I urge these Committee Members to use their voices to join mine, and thousands of others, as we push for a full review, by co-sponsoring bill S.2067/A.3162 that would establish an independent commission to investigate the state’s handling of the pandemic. While this bill does not go through the Aging Committee, its members have a duty to help protect our most vulnerable New Yorkers. Inaction is unacceptable. We need to push for the passage of

these bills and time is running out. The seniors of the future deserve a look back at what happened in the past to ensure their safety and happiness, and the families that lost their loved ones deserve the truth. We are not going anywhere, and will continue to advocate in honor of them. Don't let their deaths be in vain. All of the Senators here today have the power to help give us answers and help us begin to heal."

Bill Hammond said, *"The state needs a careful and comprehensive investigation of its pandemic response – ideally conducted by a commission of independent experts. Otherwise, there is a danger that the lessons of this catastrophe will go to waste. As long as the state's leaders leave this crucial job undone, any promise to make New York 'age-friendly' will ring hollow."*

As the ranking member of the Senate Standing Committee on Aging, Senator Serino exercised her ability to invite guest speakers to the Committee meeting pursuant to §2(2)(d) of Rule VII of the Rules of the Senate for the 2021-2022 legislative session, as laid out in Senate Resolution No 2 of 2021.

The effort today was particularly important given that just last week—thanks to a motion for committee consideration filed by Senator Jim Tedisco—a bill that would establish a temporary state commission to study and investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic response on deaths in nursing homes passed in the Senate's Health Committee with bipartisan support. The bill ([S.2067/A.3162](#)), which is sponsored by Senator Tedisco and co-sponsored by Senators Serino and Borrello, has since been referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

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