Senate Republicans Call on Senate Majority to Hold Multiple Oversight Hearings on Health

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New York State Senators Tom O'Mara and Patrick M. Gallivan today requested Senate Finance Committee Chair Liz Krueger work with her leadership to schedule multiple Joint Legislative Budget Hearings on Health instead of the single one scheduled later this month. In the wake of the Attorney General's scathing nursing home report, mass resignations at the State Department of Health (DOH), and bipartisan calls for investigation into the Governor's administration, at least one of these hearings should be solely committed to

questioning the embattled DOH Commissioner Howard Zucker.

"The Attorney General's report on nursing homes set off a chain of events that has left the Executive Branch in a deep scandal of their own making. Commissioner Zucker and the Department of Health, whether by their own free will or at someone else's direction, have repeatedly thwarted the authority of the Legislature in the past year. More importantly, they've repeatedly lied to New Yorkers in the past year. These breaches of the public trust are unforgivable. While my colleagues and I are still calling upon Commissioner Zucker to resign, we are also urging Senator Krueger and her Democratic colleagues to help us provide some much-needed oversight in this important matter -- or else further risk losing the Legislature's own credibility as a co-equal branch," said Senator O'Mara, Ranking Member of Senate Finance Committee.

"New Yorkers deserve truth and transparency in how the Executive Branch and the Department of Health handled the COVID-19 crisis and, specifically, why the number of nursing home deaths were under-reported. The Administration's refusal to share information and its apparent deliberate attempt to mislead the public raises even more troubling questions. Again, it is time for the Legislature to end the Governor's unilateral control of the state's pandemic response and provide much needed oversight," said Senator Gallivan, Ranking Member of Senate Health Committee.

"In the wake of the AG's report and the mass exodus of health department officials, one thing is clear -- the Legislature must have adequate time to demand answers from DOH Commissioner Howard Zucker. Legislative budget hearings are already long, with many individuals and groups appearing to provide testimony. We are urging Senator Krueger to do the right thing, add additional hearings, and ensure the Legislature has adequate time to get answers and demand accountability from the Department of Health," said Senate Republican Leader Robert Ortt.

Leader Ortt and members of the Senate Republican Conference have called upon Commissioner Zucker to resign after the Attorney General's devastating report confirmed that the DOH had severely underreported nursing home deaths related to coronavirus. After stonewalling for months, Commissioner Zucker miraculously began producing some of the long-sought-after data just a few hours after the Attorney General's report was published.

Last week, Senate Republicans continued the push for an independent investigation -- with subpoena power -- into Governor Cuomo and the DOH's handling of the coronavirus pandemic in nursing homes by:

Making a motion to issue subpoenas in the Senate Investigations Committee, which resulted in the Democratic Chair refusing to consider the motion and having Senator O'Mara muted; and

Holding a Joint Senate-Assembly virtual event with families who have lost loved ones in nursing homes and have repeatedly demanded an independent investigation be conducted.

Also last week, Empire Center for Public Policy, joined in an amicus brief by Senator Jim Tedisco, won a court ruling that requires the DOH to turn over nursing home data made in a FOIL request.

Any investigations or oversight hearings should also consider why multiple senior officials at the DOH have resigned in the last year.

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