



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## SENATORS O'MARA & SERINO CALL ON MAJORITY LEADER ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS TO STRIP COMMITTEE CHAIR POSITIONS FROM COMPLICIT SENATORS

SUSAN SERINO February 12, 2021

| ISSUE: **CORONAVIRUS; COVID-19; SENIORS; NURSING HOMES; ADULT CARE FACILITIES**

Senator Tom O'Mara, ranking member of the Senate Investigations Committee and Senator Sue Serino, ranking member of the Senate Aging Committee today called on Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins to strip committee chair positions from legislators who refused to issue subpoenas and then were involved in a secret closed door meeting where a top aide to Governor Cuomo admitted to deliberately withholding information regarding nursing home deaths from the public, the Legislature, and the federal government.

Senators James Skoufis and Rachel May, who chair the Senate's Investigations and Aging Committee respectively, both denied motions in their committees put forth by their Republican colleagues to issue subpoenas to compel an investigation. They then took part in a secret meeting where Secretary to the Governor Melissa DeRosa admitted that the administration deliberately withheld information to avoid a federal investigation and apologized for the "political position" the obstruction of justice put them in. Instead of sharing this shocking admission, these complicit Senators released a misleading statement about the meeting that continued the cover up and accused their Republican colleagues of

“playing politics” on the issue.

“Top Senate Democrats, including the chairs of these key committees with oversight responsibilities on nursing homes, are clearly complicit in protecting Governor Cuomo and his inner circle. They have helped the Cuomo administration conceal the truth and mislead all New Yorkers, but especially the thousands and thousands of families who have lost their loved ones. They no longer have the public's trust,” said Senator Tom O’Mara, ranking member on the Senate Investigations Committee.

“As lawmakers, we have a duty to those we serve to represent their best interests and be transparent in our work. These reports raise enough red flags to sideline these chairs until a full investigation into the state's handling of the COVID crisis in our nursing homes is complete. At the very least they showed callous disregard for the victims in putting their political concerns before the needs of these vulnerable people, at worst they are witnesses to criminal wrongdoing. To rebuild trust in our government, the Legislature must start by investigating that secret meeting and taking swift action to pursue the justice and accountability these residents and their loved ones have been denied for too long,” said Senator Sue Serino, ranking member of the Senate Aging Committee.

Senate Republicans have called on their colleagues for months to use their subpoena power to launch an investigation and get real answers for the thousands of grieving families who lost loved ones in nursing homes. When Senator O’Mara and Senator Serino issued motions to issue subpoenas in both the Investigations Committee and Aging Committee meetings, the chairs, Senator James Skoufis and Senator Rachel May, denied the motions. Senator Skoufis went as far as to mute the microphone of Senator O’Mara, the ranking member, and

Senator May said she “didn’t see the point” of issuing subpoenas.

After the recording of the meeting was leaked in the New York Post, Senate Republicans called on the Majority to immediately convene an immediate special session to revoke the Governor’s emergency powers and reiterated the urgent need for an independent investigation by the Department of Justice to hold everyone involved in this cover-up accountable.

With their refusal to issue subpoenas, their subsequent involvement in the meeting, and their failures to raise a flag on the shocking cover-up by the administration, Senators Skoufis and May are clearly conflicted and have lost their credibility when it comes to leading these committees. In addition, they should be witnesses to an investigation. Senators O’Mara and Serino call on Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins to immediately strip their chair positions pending a full, independent investigation.

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