



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

SERINO AND TEDISCO PUSH FOR DOH INVESTIGATION OF NURSING HOME DEATHS

SUSAN SERINO February 7, 2022

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ALBANY, NY – After New York’s new Health Commissioner, Dr. Mary Bassett, testified before the Senate Finance Committee that she would not review the state’s past pandemic policies as they relate to nursing homes, Senators Jim Tedisco and Sue Serino today introduced Legislation that would compel the Commissioner to do just that. The Senators—who have been longtime proponents of an independent investigation into the state’s COVID-19 nursing home policies—are urging Governor Kathy Hochul to include their legislation in her 30-Day Budget Amendments.

“The Senate Republican conference has been a strong voice of accountability and transparency in New York State government. In particular, there have been no stronger advocates for the 15,000 plus

nursing home victims than Senators Tedisco and Serino, and I applaud their tenacity in continuing to demand answers for all New Yorkers. While the Governor's office, DOH, and the Majorities in the Legislature are content to sweep history under the rug, this conference is fighting to ensure the lives of the 15,000 plus victims are remembered, which is why we are introducing legislation to designate March 25th as "We Care Remembrance Day" – to memorialize the lives lost and ensure we never repeat the mistakes of the past," said Senate Republican Leader Rob Ort.

"More than 15,000 New York nursing home and residential healthcare facility residents lost their lives to COVID-19 during the early days of the pandemic," said Senator Serino. "While the Commissioner may not want to "unravel" what happened with the former Administration in regards to the State's pandemic response in nursing homes, we have a duty as public officials to seek answers and accountability, and to ensure that we learn from the past to improve future policy. As an academic and a medical professional, I hope Dr. Bassett can appreciate the need to proceed with such a review, and as a New Yorker, I hope she can find it in her heart to do what she can to provide closure to the thousands of grieving loved ones across the state who were impacted. It is the right thing to do, and I urge Governor Hochul to honor her promises to families who lost loved ones to COVID-19 in nursing homes and include this language in her budget amendments."

"I was shocked and dismayed to hear Commissioner Bassett say she has not even bothered to read her predecessor's one-page March 25, 2020 Executive Order that forced COVID-positive patients into nursing homes and that she refuses to 'unravel' what happened that led to the deaths of 15,000 of our most vulnerable citizens from the coronavirus in New York State-regulated nursing homes – one of the worst disasters in our state's history. We owe it to the memories of all those who lost their lives from COVID-19 in our nursing homes and their families to thoroughly investigate what happened in 2020 and for the state Health Department to develop and recommend an action plan to prevent a terrible tragedy like this from ever happening again," said Senator Tedisco.

"When Governor Hochul took office, she promised to usher in a new era of transparency and accountability. That is why it was profoundly disappointing to hear our new Health Commissioner dismiss the need to investigate one of the most horrific public health missteps in state history," said Aging Committee member Senator George Borrello. "The painful losses borne by the families of nursing home residents who were casualties of this catastrophic policy should not be in vain. This legislation would ensure that those families receive closure, and that lawmakers and administration officials gain insights and information on the decision-making failures that led to this tragedy."

Ahead of her nomination in January's Finance Committee Meeting, when asked by Senator Jim Tedisco what Dr. Bassett may have learned from the policies of the past administration, she answered in part that she has made the decision not to *"unravel what had happened in the nursing homes under the previous commissioner."*

When Senator Serino followed up seeking clarification on her comments, Dr. Bassett claimed to have not read the one page of the now notorious March 25th Order that required nursing homes to admit COVID-positive patients and

prohibited them from testing those patients. Dr. Bassett further doubled down saying, *“As I said, whether you agree or not, I just want to be clear that I decided not to look back.”*

The bill sponsored by the lawmakers would expressly require the Commissioner of Health to conduct an investigation of the Department’s response and handling during the pandemic and provide a report to the Legislature and the public on its findings and recommendations, including a pandemic response action plan for future outbreaks, within 90 days. The report would also require the Department to finally provide an accurate accounting of COVID-19 fatalities in nursing homes, which is a necessary step for the State to regain the public’s trust.

Serino and Tedisco also are introducing a bill to designate March 25th as *“We Care Remembrance Day,”* an annual day of remembrance in New York State for the nursing home residents and all those souls we tragically lost from COVID.

To view Senator Tedisco’s exchange from the Senate Finance Committee meeting, [click here](#).

To view Senator Serino’s exchange from the Senate Finance Committee meeting, [click here](#).

Senator Serino is the Ranking Member of the Senate’s Aging Committee.

Senator Tedisco is the Ranking Member of the Senate’s Mental Health Committee.

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