



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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BIPARTISAN COALITION CONTINUES PUSH FOR JUSTICE FOR NURSING HOME VICTIMS

SUSAN SERINO March 23, 2022

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ALBANY, NY—Friday, March 25th, marks the two-year anniversary of the state’s deadly order that sent COVID-positive patients directly into New York’s nursing homes. While the now disgraced former Governor and his Administration continue to argue that the order had no impact on the rate of COVID fatalities in these facilities, data suggests otherwise and **an audit recently released by the State Comptroller** provided further evidence that the state covered up nursing home COVID deaths. Despite mounting evidence of wrongdoing by the

former Administration, to date the Legislature and the Executive have continuously failed to take any meaningful steps to fully investigate the state's overall handling of the COVID crisis in these facilities.

Today, a coalition of bipartisan legislators stood alongside family members to honor the lives and legacies of the 15,000+ New York nursing home and other adult care facility residents who died from COVID-19 during the pandemic by continuing their push for justice. At the event, the group was unified in their call for the passage of legislation (S. 2067/A. 3162) that would compel an investigation into the former Administration's handling of the pandemic as it relates to these facilities. The group also pushed for the passage of a bill that has been introduced to mark March 25th as 'We Care Remembrance Day' (S. 8217), after the Senate's Supermajority refused to advance a resolution by the same name last year.

Assemblyman Ron Kim, Chair of the Assembly's Aging Committee, said, *"This is a solemn time of year for thousands of grieving nursing home families. It is almost two years from the date that the former governor ordered untested, covid-19 patients back into unprepared nursing home facilities, while taking away their rights. The work that this group has done in a short while has saved thousands of lives and I am deeply humbled to be standing alongside them in this fight. Our work is not done; we will continue to push for a bi-partisan investigation into the decisions that led to thousands of unnecessary deaths, a victims' compensation fund, and help families find recourse in the courts for the wrongful deaths of their loved one."*

Senator Sue Serino, Ranking Member of the Senate's Aging Committee, said, *"As we begin to see a return to some sort of 'normal' in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of grieving families remain trapped in their nightmare, unable to move forward as the state refuses to take a hard look at what went wrong that led to the deaths of 15000+ vulnerable New Yorkers. While we have a new Governor, and a new Health Commissioner, we still do not have answers or accountability. Until an independent investigation is completed, lawmakers and others can continue to bury their heads in the sand in hopes that moving forward means we will forget. Mark my words: we will not forget, and we will not stop pushing until New Yorkers get the answers, accountability, and better path forward they so deserve."*

"The marking of this day, March 25th, has sadly and tragically become a new 'day of infamy' in New York State to reflect on the day two years ago when former Governor Cuomo issued an executive order

mandating COVID-positive patients be placed into nursing homes and to remember the 15,000 lives lost to the virus. We remember that every life lost was more than just a statistic, these individuals were someone's spouse, parent, grandparent and sibling and they deserve justice. The legislation Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt, Senator Sue Serino and I are sponsoring establishes March 25th as an annual 'We Care Remembrance Day' as a day that should be set aside in New York State moving forward for solemn reflection of all those souls who needlessly lost their lives," said Senator Jim Tedisco (R,C-Glenville).

"Two years ago, disgraced ex-Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the fateful order to send COVID-positive patients into New York nursing homes. His order ultimately cost thousands of seniors' their lives, and his administration's coverup and corrupt book deal is still causing untold amounts of pain and suffering for the families who lost their loved ones. I thank Senators Serino and Tedisco, and all of my Senate Republican colleagues, for leading this push to honor the memory of those who were lost. We are here today to show that We Care, and we will not stop fighting for answers and accountability until families get the justice they deserve," said Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt.

Vivian Rivera Zayas, Co-Founder of Voices for Seniors, said, "On this day of remembrance, we are all a voice for a senior who no longer has a voice. This is both an extremely delicate and important responsibility. If we chose to be silent, we have made their suffering and death irrelevant. How can we do that? We must not be silent, not this day nor any other."

Janice Dean, Fox News Senior Meteorologist, who lost her in-laws and has become an outspoken voice for justice for grieving New York families, said, "Two years ago this week, the former governor of New York Andrew Cuomo along with his former Health Commissioner Howard Zucker signed the order that allowed a Category 5 disaster into New York nursing homes where our most vulnerable resided. Why was this allowed to happen and why is the death toll still being covered up? The aftermath has never been examined, and the current administration seems to prefer that we forget instead of learning from the past. Our families deserve a fair, thorough investigation so that this catastrophe can never happen again. Why are we still screaming for the truth to finally be revealed?"

"Whatever happened to telling the truth? Especially when it comes to life, death, and health. The Comptroller's audit was further proof that the former Administration lied. Governor Hochul can either be part of the solution for our families or become the problem. The ball is in her court and our families are counting on her to push for the truth and accountability," said the Arbeen Family.

"My mother, Doris, lived independently until 2018 when she moved into a nursing home in the Buffalo area. When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, we got the call that nursing homes were being shut down to visitors. Several weeks later, one of the patients there tested positive. They tested all the other patients and

*my mother was negative. Around May 6th, my mother unfortunately contracted COVID-19, and by May 17th she succumbed to it. I've shared my family's experience with Senator Tedisco, Senator Serino and Leader Ort and thank them for being out-front on this issue seeking a bi-partisan investigation with subpoena power to get answers so something like this never happens again and for sponsoring legislation so New Yorkers who lost their lives like my mother will never be forgotten. I urge Governor Hochul to get behind this legislation and pass it into law," said **Dan Mathias of Clifton Park, who lives in Senator Tedisco's District.***

In an effort to continue raising awareness, New Yorkers are encouraged to light a candle on the evening of March 25th in honor of the 15000+ and post a picture of it on their social media along with #WeCare and #15000PLUS.