



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara warns that Hochul review of NY's COVID-19 response will be a 'multi-million-dollar whitewash'

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 3, 2022

| ISSUE: **COMBATING COVID-19 AND PROTECTING NEW YORKERS; PROTECTING NURSING HOME RESIDENTS**



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Albany, N.Y., November 3—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) is warning that Governor Hochul's long-awaited review of New York's COVID-19 response, including the state's fateful decision to send COVID hospital patients back into nursing homes, will be "too

little, too late and just another in-house, multi-million-dollar whitewashing of the truth.”

***Spectrum News* reported today** that the Hochul administration confirmed that it is finalizing a contract with Virginia-based Olson Group, Ltd. to reexamine the state’s COVID-related policies and actions since March 2020. The state’s contract with the firm is expected to cost taxpayers at least \$4.3 million and take at least a year to complete.

According to the *Spectrum News* report, the investigation will “report directly” to Hochul and her top aides, including state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Commissioner Jackie Bray.

O’Mara, Ranking Member on the Senate Investigations Committee, said, “Governor Hochul is following the playbook of her predecessor, ex-Governor Cuomo, by conducting an in-house review of New York’s COVID response. The difference is that this one will cost taxpayers millions of dollars so that Hochul can try to call it an ‘outside, independent’ investigation. Far from it. It’s too little, too late and just another in-house, multi-million-dollar whitewashing of the truth. It’s shaping up to be another stonewalling effort to cover up and conceal bad decisions, especially on nursing homes.”

O’Mara has consistently criticized Cuomo, Hochul, former state Health Commissioner Howard Zucker and current Health Commissioner Mary Bassett for failing to authorize a timely, independent investigation of the state’s pandemic response. He has also repeatedly called on the chair of the Senate Investigations Committee, Senator James Skoufis, to issue subpoenas to former top Cuomo aides in an effort to get to the bottom of many of the state’s decisions – a move that Senate Democrats have repeatedly rejected.

O’Mara said, “A desperately needed reassessment and reexamination has never been a priority for Governor Kathy Hochul, even though it’s critical, unfinished work. The ongoing,

unexplainable lack of urgency on a comprehensive, top-to-bottom, independent examination of New York's COVID-19 response -- including its costs, what we did right and, more importantly, where things went wrong -- remains unacceptable. The fact that Hochul has shown no interest whatsoever in getting to the bottom of New York's tragic decision to pressure nursing homes into accepting COVID hospital patients remains a travesty. It will be one of the saddest chapters in this state's history. Now she wants to spend millions of taxpayer dollars to do an investigation that she herself will control and delay it for at least another year in the hopes of sweeping it under the rug forever."

Testifying before the Senate Aging Committee earlier this year, Bill Hammond of the Empire Center for Public Policy said, "The key to being better prepared is to learn from hard experience. 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 invaluable lessons of this once-in-a-century catastrophe will go to waste."