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THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



SENATOR
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March 15th, 2021

Dear Senator Skoufis,

I write to you today to express my grave concern regarding the State's failure to protect individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, specifically those individuals residing in group homes. Particularly disturbing to me is the April 10th directive issued by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), mandating that group homes regulated by OPWDD accept COVID positive patients. This order mimics the controversial edict that forced nursing homes to accept COVID positive patients, much to the detriment of nursing homes residents.

A consortium of three groups, Disability Rights New York, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and the New York Civil Liberties Union, have drafted an extensive report on OPWDD's response to the pandemic. According to the report, individuals residing in OPWDD group homes were three times more likely to contract COVID-19 and three times more likely to die from it compared to the general population of New York. The report also asserts that group homes received inadequate COVID-19 guidance from OPWDD, leading to logistical challenges and almost certainly allowing COVID positive residents and staff to return to group homes. Additionally, because the State did not give OPWDD group homes the same priority as nursing facilities, maintaining appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and staffing levels (without hazard pay) were challenges.

To date, OPWDD has resisted calls for greater transparency regarding the release of data related to group homes. I respectfully request that you launch a transparent and comprehensive investigation into OPWDD as the Chair of the Investigations and Government Operations Committee. Prior to the release of the full nursing home data, the Cuomo Administration released a misleading statistics regarding the number of deaths in nursing homes. We must come together as New Yorkers and demand that OPWDD be transparent about their conduct during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'APalumbo'.

Senator Anthony Palumbo
Member, Investigations and Government Operations

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael V. Martucci'.

Senator Mike Martucci
Ranking Member, Senate Disabilities Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jim Tedisco'.

Senator James Tedisco
Ranking Member, Senate Mental Health Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Fred Akshar'.

Senator Fred Akshar
Member, Senate Disabilities Committee