

Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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A COLUMN FROM STATE SENATOR PAM HELMING

The Legislature Must Help Lead New York Out of This Crisis

It has been more than two weeks since the Attorney General's report on coronavirus-related deaths in New York's nursing homes. A report that confirmed for me, and a growing number of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, that it is long past time to end the Governor's emergency powers.

But the Legislature has yet to rescind these powers.

Despite more than 15,000 seniors in nursing homes and long-term care facilities who have died from COVID-19.

Despite serious questions about state policies and the Department of Health's oversight into the care of our elderly citizens.

The Legislature has still not acted.

My bill to repeal the Governor's emergency powers has been brought to the Senate floor 14 times. Fourteen times it has been rejected by Senate Democrats.

Last Friday, after a secret Democratic meeting and a shocking admission by the Governor's top aide became public, 14 Democratic Senators were motivated to voice their support for ending these powers.

So again I say: Let's take a vote. End these executive powers. Restore legislative oversight to our state government.

Do we need a full and independent investigation into the COVID-19 deaths of our most vulnerable citizens? Yes.

Do their families – and all New Yorkers – deserve transparency and accountability from their state’s elected leaders? Yes.

Does the state government – Legislature and Executive – have the responsibility to respond to this crisis with policies and solutions that will protect our seniors? Yes.

One immediate step we can take is to end the Governor’s emergency powers so the Legislature can help lead us out of this crisis.

The Governor admitted that his administration “made a mistake” by not providing a fuller account of nursing home deaths in a timely manner. He said, “We should have provided more information faster.” But he refuses to apologize for any of his actions. New Yorkers deserve better from their leaders.

I am calling on my colleagues in the Legislature to do the right thing and come together to rescind the Governor’s emergency powers.

It is time to reclaim our lawful role as a co-equal branch of government. It is time for the Legislature to lead.

Pam Helming represents the 54th District in the New York State Senate.