



ANDREW R. GARBARINO
Assemblyman 7th District

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April 24, 2020

Hon. Richard Gottfried
Chairman
Standing Committee on Health
New York State Assembly
LOB 823
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Chairman Gottfried:

We have all been devastated to learn of the overwhelming number of COVID-19 deaths to date in New York nursing homes, including 52 at the Long Island State Veterans Home at Stony Brook. While the Department of Health has announced a new hotline in conjunction with the Attorney General's Office as well as an investigation headed by the Attorney General, it is imperative that the Legislature also exercise its oversight powers. As Members of the Assembly Committee on Health, it is our duty to hold a public hearing on this matter.

It seems clear from news reports that nursing home operators who expressed alarm and sought to reject patients or suggest alternate placements had their requests denied. Many nursing homes have also reported an inability to provide proper protective gear and isolated placements for COVID-19 patients which was passed along to the Department of Health. This is unacceptable, especially considering the fact that nursing homes were required by the New York State Department of Health to admit COVID-19 patients.

Governor Cuomo recently described this virus spreading in a nursing home as being "like fire through dry grass." Given that these facilities house the populations known to be the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus, our committee must begin an examination independent of the administration. We need a public hearing to allow for clear and unbiased testimony from operators, staff, patients, and families. Although we face restrictions due to the current pandemic, we still have a job to do – in this instance, we have the means to conduct oversight virtually and safely. The legislature can then determine what actions we must take to protect this vulnerable population.

As Chairman, you have the ability to call a public hearing. We are asking that you please do so for the health and safety of fellow New Yorkers.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew R. Garbarino
Member, Committee on Health
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Kevin M. Byrne
Ranking Member, Committee on Health
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