

NEW JERSEY SENATE

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September 12, 2023

Nicholas P. Scutari
NJ Senate President
67 Walnut Ave.
Clark, NJ 07066

Dear Senate President Scutari,

We were pleased to see a quick, bipartisan response in defense of our brave veterans after the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a scathing report on the abhorrent management of two State-run memorial homes.

As you would agree, it is our duty to protect our veterans after everything that they sacrificed to keep us and our freedoms safe. We must do whatever it takes to ensure that no veteran endures the travesty of poor living conditions, inadequate care, and a systematic failure to meet basic needs. Every day that we delay these efforts puts more veterans who reside in these long-term care facilities at risk of uncontrolled, serious, and deadly diseases and infections.

For this reason, we are calling for the Legislature to return to Trenton and investigate these matters further. A special legislative committee should be established to analyze the results of the DOJ report and hold hearings to recommend an appropriate course of action. It is clear from the report that there is a lack of accountability from this administration and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA). We must ensure that those who are responsible for failing to protect veterans are held accountable for their inaction.

Specifically, the DOJ report claims that the DMAVA impeded with a federal investigation on top of violating veterans' Fourteenth Amendment rights. The report states that staff attorneys and facility management followed DOJ department staff around the facility "far beyond what was necessary to provide direction, standing nearby as DOJ staff spoke to witnesses, and knocking on doors of offices and rooms where witnesses were being interviewed. Witnesses reported that supervisors and managers inquired about what questions DOJ personnel had asked and specifically discouraged staff members from speaking with DOJ."

In addition to holding hearings, legislators must work together to pass bipartisan legislation aimed at protecting vulnerable residents at veterans and nursing homes so that we can prevent these atrocities from ever happening again. One bipartisan bill you may want to consider is [S-67](#), which would establish the Office of Inspector General for Veterans' Facilities. Under the bill, the Inspector General for Veterans' Facilities would be able to investigate complaints at State veterans' facilities. The inspector general would also be empowered to conduct evaluations and inspections to ensure the safety and quality of care provided at State veterans' facilities.

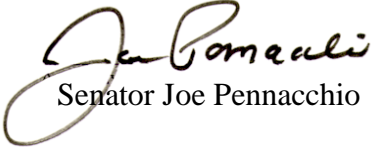
As you are aware, from the onset of the pandemic, legislators called for investigations into the State's response on six separate occasions, but those requests never evolved into action. In fact, the former Senate President agreed to create a bipartisan Review and Recovery Committee, but that never came to fruition.

Because we all share the same concerns about how veterans were treated at these State-run homes and want to protect our more vulnerable residents, it is imperative that the Legislature return to Trenton immediately. A select bipartisan committee with subpoena power will help achieve effective solutions that will protect veterans and hold those who failed to keep them safe accountable.

The abhorrent conditions that our veterans were subjected to in these State-run memorial homes should never happen again. We must all do our part as legislators to protect veterans in our State.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,


Senator Joe Pennacchio


Senator Kristin M. Corrado

cc: Chairman Joseph P. Cryan, Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee
Chairman Joseph F. Vitale, Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee