



NEW JERSEY SENATE

SENATE CHAMBERS

P.O. Box 099

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0099

June 2, 2020

Ms. Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
7500 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21244-8013

Dear Administrator Verma,

I am writing to you today because New Jersey is in a crisis. It has failed to protect our most vulnerable residents and the need for federal oversight and intervention is glaring. As of June 1, 2020, the number of COVID related deaths at state-regulated nursing homes stands at 5,930, a number of lost lives that sadly grows with each passing day. To date, one out of every ten long-term nursing facility residents in New Jersey has died.

New Jersey's administration has proven to be ineffective, impotent, and a threat to those who live, work, and visit these facilities. Please consider:

- The state's decision to direct nursing homes to admit patients from hospitals who had previously tested positive for the virus and prohibiting facilities from requiring incoming patients be tested for COVID prior to admission.
- According to a published report, the New Jersey Commissioner of Health told several health department officials, "I never have the Governor's attention," and "I have never had a one-on-one with him."
- The Assistant Commissioner of Public Health, who was recently fired, is claiming to be a scapegoat for the administration's abject failures.
- A group of health department employees tasked with overseeing New Jersey's pandemic response sent an anonymous letter saying:
 - The administration is making things up as they proceed.
 - Leadership failures of the Department of Health Commissioner led to preventable deaths.
 - A toxic culture of infighting in the Governor's administration has prevented the right decisions from being made.
 - Allegations that the Commissioner of Human Services asked to steer a \$500,000 contract to look at the state's COVID response to a politically

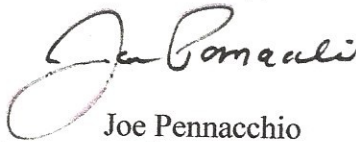
connected group.

Career public health officials are risking their livelihoods and screaming for an investigation of their own workplace where they believe incompetence and corruption permeate. Family and friends who have sadly lost a loved one need answers as to why the government failed them in their greatest time of need. Most importantly, the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, teachers, and veterans who reside in these nursing homes deserve a safe place to call home.

I implore you to use your authority and any other federal resources that may be needed to thoroughly investigate and take control of New Jersey's long-term nursing facilities. Lives depend on it.

Thank you for your time and anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Pennacchio". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joe" being particularly prominent.

Joe Pennacchio
Senator – 26th Legislative District