

***New Jersey
State Commission of Investigation***



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Immediate Release**

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***SCI REPORT*
PANDEMIC EXPOSED SYSTEMIC
FLAWS AT NEW JERSEY VETERANS
HOMES**

TRENTON – The State Commission of Investigation (SCI) released a report today finding the COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic flaws within the management, operation and structure of the Veterans Memorial Homes operated by the State of New Jersey, some of which remain.

The SCI report details how the Menlo Park and Paramus homes, where nearly 200 people died from COVID-related causes, were unprepared for the massive absenteeism by frontline staff in the initial weeks of the pandemic and mismanaged securing replacement staff, leaving existing employees overwhelmed. Communication

breakdowns occurred among the various State government departments overseeing New Jersey's COVID response and within the management of the homes, worsening an already chaotic situation in which remaining staff were left to deliver care while trying to contain a highly contagious virus in facilities not built to handle quarantine or isolation situations.

"The SCI's investigation reveals how the pandemic presented a perfect storm of circumstances that exposed systemic and, in some cases, enduring problems in the administration and supervision of the veterans homes," said SCI Chair Tiffany Williams Brewer. "The veterans and their relatives who live in these facilities deserve better."

To increase accountability, better safeguard residents and strengthen the government's oversight of their operation, the Commission recommends the Legislature and Governor consider reassigning the homes from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to a newly created cabinet-level agency or commission with specific authority for the homes. At a minimum, any government entity responsible for overseeing the veterans homes should be led and staffed by professionals with significant clinical experience.

The Commission also recommends that the State government clarify the essential employee status of nurses and frontline staff at the veterans homes and uphold the requirement for those workers to report to duty in emergencies. Given the need to provide uninterrupted care to residents in a public health emergency or any other crisis, the contract rates paid for temporary healthcare workers to supplement

staff should also be suspended or temporarily increased to allow the veterans homes to remain competitive with the private sector.

Additionally, the Commission recommends prioritizing numerous facility and technology upgrades at the Menlo Park and Paramus facilities, some of which have already begun, such as converting units from double occupancy to single-bed rooms, updating from a paper-based to an electronic medical record keeping system and installing wireless Internet access throughout the facilities.



The State Commission of Investigation is an independent New Jersey watchdog agency established in 1968 to investigate organized crime and corruption, waste of tax money and other abuses of the public trust. Copies of public reports are available at the Commission's offices or via its Web site at www.state.nj.us/sci.