



ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER  
HON. STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

December 11, 2020

Dr. Gale Burstein  
Erie County Health Commissioner  
95 Franklin Avenue  
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Commissioner Burstein:

The Office of Erie County Comptroller received information via our Whistleblower Hotline that would be quite troubling about Health Inspectors that entered private businesses and locations with community groups. According to the Whistleblower complaint, a Senior Investigative Public Health Sanitarian died from COVID-19 or health complications due to having contracted COVID-19, sometime in late November. If true, this raises serious concerns including, but not limited to:

- Why didn't the Erie County Department of Health notify the public that one or more Health Inspectors, many of whom enter private businesses and other community buildings, had tested positive for COVID-19 and eventually died from it?
- Is it possible that Health Inspectors were spreaders or super-spreaders of COVID-19 while levying fines and closing businesses?
- If it is the case that one, or many, of your Health Inspectors contracted COVID-19 can you confirm that contact tracers notified any businesses or establishments they may have entered in the course of their duties?
- Why was the decision made to keep secret from the public that Erie County Health Department Inspectors contracted COVID-19 and that was the cause of death for at least one of your employees?
- How many Health Department employees tested positive for COVID-19?
- When did the first Health Department employee test positive for COVID-19? What is the date of your first positive COVID test for a Health Department employee?
- How many businesses were notified by contact tracers that one or more Health Inspectors tested positive and eventually died from COVID-19?
- Considering Health Inspectors have been coming into close contact with many businesses and members of the community, what was the reason for keeping their positive test or tests secret?
- Is it possible that the very same Health Inspectors that have fined and in some instances closed down businesses have in fact walked into those establishments being sick and stricken with COVID-19 themselves?
- Have you temporarily suspended sending Health Inspectors into businesses because some of them have tested positive for COVID-19?

If in fact a Senior Investigative Public Health Sanitarian or any other Health Inspectors died from COVID-19 or have tested positive for COVID-19, please inform the public immediately, and have contact tracers notify all businesses visited by an Erie County Health Inspector.

Sincerely,

Hon. Stefan I. Mychajliw Jr.  
ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER