

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (LETTER ATTACHED)

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## House GOP Leader Jim Townsend sends letter to US Attorney General

Artesia, NM— House Republican Leader Jim Townsend recently sent a letter to Attorney General Bill Barr highlighting potential civil rights violations in New Mexico. The letter was sent just days after the 24 House Republican members delivered a letter addressing similar concerns to Governor Lujan Grisham.

The letter raises concerns over the Governor's mandated closure of small businesses, prohibition of government-determined "non-essential" medical care, and threats of civil fines of which the executive has no discernible authority to impose. Leader Townsend asks the US Attorney General to include New Mexico in any civil rights violation inquiries that his office may be investigating. The House Republican Leader additionally offers to provide support and documentation should any civil rights violations be found in their investigation of the currently in place executive orders.

"The Governor's actions have made it clear that she will push in any way possible to test the limits of every New Mexican's constitutional rights," said House Republican Leader Jim Townsend (R-Artesia), "If civil rights violations have occurred across our country as a result of these mandated closures, I have little doubt that New Mexico will unfortunately be in that mix. I am confident AG Barr will be objective in his examinations of this sensitive issue."



State of New Mexico  
House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL

Santa Fe

April 29, 2020

The Honorable William R. Barr  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

As our nation continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe it is imperative that any effort to stem the spread of the virus must be conducted in a manner that protects the civil liberties of every citizen of this country. Your recent announcement that the Department of Justice may have an obligation to address overreach by Governors whose actions violate people's constitutional rights during the current pandemic was not only encouraging to read, but timely.

As you already are aware, numerous Governors across our country have been operating with almost dictatorial powers by intimidating people to stay at home, denying the right to worship, and arbitrarily deciding which businesses are essential and nonessential. The result of these unprecedented gubernatorial actions has been wide spread trampling of our citizens' civil liberties, which should have never been allowed to occur.

The State of New Mexico is currently in the middle of a government imposed shut down of our economy, including the forced closure of thousands of locally-owned small businesses; prohibiting hospitals from performing so-called "nonessential" medical procedures and surgeries, while our state's hospital system has plenty of available beds and medical professionals are being furloughed; and limiting the gathering of more than five people, as well as restricting access to places of worship and public recreational areas. Additionally, our Governor has threatened small businesses with a fine of \$5,000 for violating New Mexico's Public Health Order, although there are no statutes which give her any authority to impose such a fine.

Therefore, I respectfully request the Department of Justice include the State of New Mexico within any civil rights violation inquiries your office may soon conduct related to the ongoing pandemic. Attached is a letter every member of my caucus sent to our Governor expressing concerns with her inability to balance the health and safety of the citizens of our state with protecting their inherent civil rights. If there is any additional information I can provide to help guide your office in reviewing potential civil rights violations by the State of New Mexico, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jim G. Townsend".

Jim G. Townsend  
House Republican Leader District 54