

KATHY CASTOR  
14TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
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COMMERCE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0914**

WASHINGTON OFFICE:  
2052 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-3376

DISTRICT OFFICE:  
4144 NORTH ARMENIA AVENUE  
SUITE 300  
TAMPA, FL 33607  
(813) 871-2817  
[www.castor.house.gov](http://www.castor.house.gov)

May 19, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
Governor  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Scott Rivkees, M.D.  
Surgeon General  
State of Florida  
4052 Bald Cypress Way  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

RE: Concerning Lack of Transparency and Likely Suppression of COVID-19 Public Health Information - Urge Answers Regarding Firing of State Public Health Data Scientist

Dear Gov. DeSantis and Surgeon General Rivkees,

I am very concerned to learn of reports that Rebekah Jones, the geographic information system manager for Department of Health's Division of Disease Control and Health Protection, who manages the State's Coronavirus data portal, was removed from her job. She has raised serious concerns about the lack of transparency of COVID-19 data being reported by the State of Florida.

According to reports, she advised, "As a word of caution, I would not expect the new team to continue the same level of accessibility and transparency that I made central to the process during the first two months. After all, my commitment to both is largely (arguably entirely) the reason I am no longer managing it."

This appears to be a troubling pattern by the State of Florida. The State previously withheld important data regarding nursing home infections and deaths, and overall mortality data reported by Medical Examiners across the State. Floridians, scientists and public health experts need accurate and timely information regarding infections, testing, disparities and mortalities in order to make the best decisions about going to work, going to school and going out in public. The State's lack of transparency around COVID-19 public health data is troubling and unwise. It is vital to help us keep our neighbors safe and that they have confidence that our government is reporting honestly. Therefore, I respectfully request immediate answers as to why Ms. Jones was fired and how the State intends to fully report all COVID-19 public health data without censorship by the Department of Health or anyone else.

As steps are taken to reopen our economy, it is imperative that we have easily accessible, detailed and protected data available to help our neighbors make decisions for their families, fight this pandemic and start building back our economy – but only when it is safe to do so. You both must commit to providing this data in a credible and transparent manner, so Floridians and our public health experts have the information they need in this fight.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor  
U.S. Representative  
Florida – District 14