



NEW JERSEY SENATE

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September 2, 2020

The Honorable Senator Stephen Sweeney
125 W. State Street
Trenton, NJ 08608

The Honorable Senator Stephen Sweeney
Kingsway Commons
Suite 400
West Deptford, NJ 08086

Dear Senate President Sweeney:

This is not the letter I want to be writing but I can't ignore my great concern or shirk the responsibility and accountability weighing on my shoulders. I took an oath to the people of this state and they deserve nothing less than my best effort as their representative and as chair of our state's Legislative Black Caucus.

This is about S-2535 and how you and I have communicated about it in person, in letters and in texts. It's about how I've also communicated in the same manner with the chair of the Judicial Committee. My message has been consistent and unwavering: Move the bill. Let's protect our residents. Let's prove, once and for all, that our marijuana initiatives are grounded in a sincere quest for social justice and not an empty rallying cry.

Senator Scutari has informed me that he won't move the bill because it interferes with what he's "trying to accomplish," which, we know, means getting recreational marijuana legalization passed through the referendum in November. That refusal to address legislation critical to the wellbeing of our residents seems to me to be a betrayal of what we come to Trenton for – to put our own egos and agendas aside in order to expediently legislate protections and remedies that benefit our fellow citizens.

Senator Sweeney, there comes a time when patience is no longer the most useful virtue, and the scale must tilt into full diligence and an unbridled rush for justice. And so, I am asking that you remove Senator Scutari as chair of the Judicial Committee.

It's been done before, allegedly for the same reason, when Senator Gill was removed as chair of the Commerce Committee for what was reported in Politico at the time as "frustration about her

leadership style” and “unnecessarily holding up legislation.” This is the same explanation you gave me at the time.

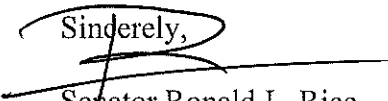
In 2016, when white legislators and lobbyists were complaining that Senator Gill was not releasing bills from committee, she had the unprecedented dishonor of being removed in the middle of a session – and she wasn’t even embroiled in the kind of ethics investigations and litigation Senator Scutari currently finds himself. In fact, his extra-senatorial entanglements have prompted public cries for him to relinquish his chairmanship until such time as the cases against him are adjudicated.

Even a blind man would see that there is a dual standard in our midst, as alarming as any other injustice based on ethnic, racial or gender bias. With no disrespect intended, honesty demands that I be very firm in my request for the removal of Senator Scutari from his chair, regardless of friendships and relationships.

At a time when the Black Lives Matter movement has heightened the awareness and conscience of New Jerseyans of every background, our Senate must demonstrate that Black legislators matter, too. How we navigate the pending decriminalization legislation and the preferential treatment of Senate leadership not only indicates our commitment to Black lives, but reveals our true colors.

I will await your response with hope and trust.

Sincerely,



Senator Ronald L. Rice
28th Legislative District

CC: Members of the New Jersey State Legislature
New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus Members
New Jersey Legislative-Civil Rights Partners
New Jersey Black Elected Officials Statewide Policy Alliance Members
New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus Statewide Faith-Based Partners