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Majority Leader

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House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

January 11, 2021

Rachel Levine
Secretary, Department of Health
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Health and Welfare Building, 8th Floor West
625 Forster Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Sec. Levine:

Last Friday you and Gov. Wolf announced the fourth iteration of the Commonwealth's COVID-19 vaccine deployment plan.

The effective and timely distribution of the vaccine to healthcare and other frontline workers, those at-risk from serious COVID-19 complications, and then the general public is the key element to protecting lives and our state being able return to normal.

Both you and Gov. Wolf have repeatedly stated the Commonwealth is restrained in the deployment of the COVID-19 vaccine by supply from Operation Warp Speed at the federal level and recommendations for distribution from federal authorities.

While I understand the latest state vaccine distribution plan seeks to align Pennsylvania with federal recommendations and laudably opens more Pennsylvanians to become eligible to receive the vaccine as supplies become available, it does vary from the latest recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in at least one very troubling way that I hope you can work with us to address.

This critical and troubling misalignment comes in Phase 1C of both state and federal COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans. In both plans' Phase 1C those "aged 16-64 years with underlying medical conditions which increase the risk of serious, life-threatening complications from COVID-19" are lowered on the vaccine distribution list and lumped in with people "aged 64-74 years old" and "other essential workers" not addressed in other COVID-19 vaccine distribution levels.

While the federal recommendation defines “other essential workers” to include “people who work in transportation and logistics, food service, housing construction and finance, information technology, communications, energy, law, media, public safety, and public health,”

Pennsylvania’s plan goes even further to include “Federal, state, county and local government workers, including county election workers, elected officials and members of the judiciary and their staff” in addition to the federal recommendation.

That being the case, the state plan goes beyond the CDC recommendation to allow state elected officials and administration cabinet officials to receive the COVID-19 vaccination at the same time as those who may be at-risk and before the general public.

In my eyes, that is simply not acceptable.

Pennsylvania’s elected and administration officials are public servants. Good servants, be they public or otherwise, put their interests and well-being below those they serve. We should not be advanced in line to receive this life-saving vaccine at a time when supplies remain limited.

Regardless of supply, we should not be advanced before the general public and certainly should not be able to receive this vaccine at the same time as at-risk populations.

Given the federal recommendation is silent on when government officials should receive the COVID-19 vaccine, I request Pennsylvania’s distribution plan remove statewide elected officials, members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, and appointed state officials from Phase 1C of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan, unless they meet one of the other underlying criteria for eligibility in phases 1A-1C, and place us with the general public in the order of eligibility.

I hope you will join me in recognizing the importance of this request at such a critical time in Pennsylvania’s COVID-19 response. I look forward to your timely reply.

Sincerely,



Rep. Kerry Benninghoff
Majority Leader
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

CC: Tom Wolf, Governor, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania