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Majority Leader

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House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

October 5, 2021

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
225 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

I have read your recent public comments and press releases regarding the lack of effort of state lawmakers—especially Republicans—to help get Pennsylvanians vaccinated. I wanted to reach out because it appears you are unaware, willfully or otherwise, of the extensive efforts of Republican lawmakers in the House to lead on this issue and help Pennsylvanians get through this pandemic safely.

Let me remind you.

In the summer of 2020, even before a vaccine was available, our caucus advocated for money for Pennsylvania-based COVID-19 vaccine research, which was ultimately approved in the budget passed in June 2020.

As the vaccine became available, and was not getting into arms, House Republicans led the effort in swiftly moving what is now Act 4 of 2021 that utilized the National Guard in more rapid vaccine deployment.

In addition, with our caucus' participation in the Joint COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, it was Republican voices that led by prioritizing getting teachers vaccinated quickly so that students and teachers can safely return to the classroom.

Even earlier this summer, two of our members called on your office to set aside \$20 million of your recently appropriated "pandemic response" reserve dollars for increased vaccine awareness, education, and deployment efforts.¹

¹ House Republicans Urge Wolf to Prioritize Small Business, Restaurant Recovery, Vaccine Deployment with Pandemic Funds, <http://www.pahousegop.com/News/20276/Latest-News/House-Republicans-Urge-Wolf-to-Prioritize-Small-Business,-Restaurant-Recovery,-Vaccine-Deployment-with-Pandemic-Funds->

Personally, my own efforts in my district are emblematic of what many of our members have done in their districts. First, I am fully vaccinated. Second, I received that vaccine at Centre Volunteers in Medicine (CVIM)—a local medical non-profit. I chose to get vaccinated at that location to help raise awareness of their great work in getting the vaccine out to our local community.

After participating at a public press conference held by CVIM on the importance of vaccine clinics and getting a vaccine widely distributed, I then spoke on the House Floor to tell people about their great work and how robust vaccination rates will help get Pennsylvania past this pandemic. The video of those remarks is posted to my publicly available Facebook and Twitter pages for the people of the 171st District—and Pennsylvania at large—to see.

Early in the vaccine rollout, when your administration was struggling to get shots into arms, our members were on the forefront of holding vaccine clinics and working to connect constituents—particularly vulnerable populations—with available vaccine.

Unfortunately, those efforts were met with criticism by your allies who viewed these efforts through the lens of political skepticism.²

It is no wonder some members may be hesitant to promote vaccinations when doing so in the past has lent itself to criticism and political barbs from colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

I believe what many Pennsylvanians, not just Republicans, find frustrating is the changing promises your administration keeps making regarding the pandemic, especially as it relates to the vaccine. Many who have received the vaccine did so out of a sense of duty to others, but also under the belief that doing so would return Pennsylvania to some semblance of normalcy.

Instead, skewed data, shifting mandates, and mixed messaging from your office has further dismayed many Pennsylvanians and has served to increase skepticism among those who were already hesitant to receive the vaccine.

What better time than now to stop the political one-upmanship? Much of my caucus has only demanded one essential thing: Inclusion into the decision-making process. A request that even to this day is being denied.

Instead of working arm-in-arm to get to the end of this virus tunnel, I am responding to letters such as your last, which releases vaccine data by legislative district.

We, in the House Republican Caucus, will continue to lead on getting Pennsylvanians through this pandemic safely, as we have from the beginning. In the spirit of the type of cooperative government the people of Pennsylvania asked for on May 18, I hope you will assist us in that effort instead of continuing to use public health to political ends.

² A Pa. lawmaker helped hundreds of seniors get COVID-19 vaccines, but not everyone says that's fair, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 17, 2021, available at <https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/vaccine-legislator-stephens-harrisburg-pennsylvania-covid-20210217.html>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kerry A. Benninghoff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "K".

Kerry Benninghoff

Majority Leader

Pennsylvania House of Representatives, 171st District