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MICHELE BROOKS
STATE SENATOR, 50TH DISTRICT



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February 16, 2021

The Honorable Alison Beam
Acting Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Health
625 Forster Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

Dear Acting Secretary Beam:

We are writing to you to express our ongoing concerns regarding the COVID-19 vaccine distribution process in Pennsylvania.

After months of conversations and efforts to ensure that Pennsylvania is prepared to distribute COVID-19 vaccines in an efficient and timely way, we are saddened by the woefully inadequate progress that we have made to date as a Commonwealth. While we understand that the volume of vaccines distributed by Operation Warp Speed to Pennsylvania has not met our hopes or expectations, the supply of vaccine is not the only hurdle we face in getting vaccines into arms. We have failed as a Commonwealth to prepare our citizens and our health care institutions for this roll-out at the ground level. We ask, has Pennsylvania distributed in its entirety, the stock of first dose vaccines received from the federal government?

One of the reasons that other states have been more successful in their rollouts is their choice to provide flexibility in their process and tailor the federal ACIP recommendations for vaccine distribution to the needs of their communities. As you are aware, Pennsylvania is able to provide that flexibility as well, and tailor its distribution to the needs of its residents beyond the federal ACIP recommendations.

During this time when the demand for vaccine is high and the volume of available doses is low, we cannot understand why we would assign the same priority to young adult smokers as we do to our seniors and other high-risk groups. We strongly believe that you must reevaluate the equal prioritization of the expanded categories within phase 1A. For example, including young smokers in this expanded phase was not required by the federal government's medical experts, it was a state decision, and is one that does not take into

account accompanying risk factors. We understand the undertaking that it will be to change the phased distribution; however, as Pennsylvania has the fifth largest senior population age 65 and older in the country, it is unconscionable not to truly prioritize their immunizations. In expanding phase 1A to include young adult smokers, you have completely demoted front-line workers in high-risk settings like emergency responders, corrections officers, school personnel, and other vulnerable populations currently in phase 1B. Age, the likelihood of close contact in congregate settings, and other medical risk factors should be considered in distributing vaccine to those who smoke.

We ask that you please impose an age restriction on smokers included in phase 1A to only those age 50 and older. This will help re-prioritize our seniors and medically vulnerable by providing vaccine access to those smokers age 50-65 who are also at-risk seniors.

By expanding the universe of recipients in Phase 1A, without having considered an array of risk factors, we fear that you have fallen short of your expressed goal to prioritize seniors and the most at-risk Pennsylvanians. We are urging you to heed our advice and communicate with Pennsylvanians. We have heard them; we need you to hear them, too. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with respect to other ways in which we can improve our COVID-19 vaccination process.

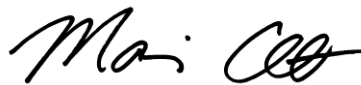
Sincerely,



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Senate Health & Human Services Committee



Senator Judy Ward, 30th District
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Senate Aging & Youth Committee



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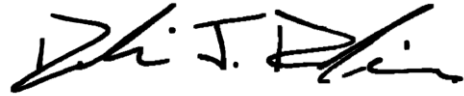
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Senator Gene Yaw, 23rd District

cc: The Honorable Tom Wolf
The Honorable Jake Corman
The Honorable Kim Ward
The Honorable Jay Costa
Kate Roberts, Deputy Secretary, Office of Legislative Affairs