

## COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

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## Congress of the United States House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2021

Governor Charlie Baker
Office of the Governor
Massachusetts State House, Room #280
24 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Dear Governor Baker,

Thank you for inviting me to speak about the American Recovery Plan last week during your daily press conference. I found it to be very positive and I appreciate your continued partnership. I write to you today to express some concerns regarding the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan, and how western Massachusetts specifically has been affected.

While the mass vaccination site at the Eastfield Mall has been instrumental in vaccinating thousands of western Massachusetts residents, the Eastfield Mall remains one of the few sites where caregivers for those 75 and older can receive a vaccine. As a result, residents in Berkshire, Franklin, and Hampshire counties must travel long distances, sometimes in inclement weather, to receive their dose. Although isolated local vaccination sites have adopted the caregiver exception and will therefore provide vaccines to accompanying caregivers, the inconsistency in implementing this rule has caused further confusion. In addition, I have heard from many caregivers who brought folks in for their vaccine before this rule was put in place and consequently missed the window to receive the vaccine themselves. This, along with the absence of a pre-registration list, has exacerbated the issues currently facing our most vulnerable populations as they try to navigate this slow and confusing rollout.

Not only would a pre-registration list allow for a smoother and more equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, such a system could also be utilized as a means to ensure that the Commonwealth does not let doses go to waste. As you are aware, the federal allocation of vaccines to each state depends not only upon the eligible population within a given state, but also the percentage of vaccines being used per weekly allocation. Compiling a centralized list of residents will allow those in subsequent steps to begin receiving the vaccine, while simultaneously ensuring that the Commonwealth administers nearly all doses allocated by the federal government.

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Finally, I ask that you work to address the discernible lack of public transportation in the most rural areas of western Massachusetts. The inability to access transportation has made receiving the COVID-19 vaccine an insurmountable task for many of my constituents. Those that live by themselves and do not have access to transportation have no means to travel to one of the vaccination locations, which are oftentimes a considerable distance away. Traveling in New England during the winter months is difficult, especially for those in the first two steps of Phase 2. That is why our efforts to ensure the equitable distribution of the vaccine must also consider vaccine accessibility for residents in rural areas and those who are homebound.

Every Bay Stater is proud to say that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has played a pivotal role in combatting the COVID-19 Pandemic. We have some of the best health care facilities in the world and they have served as a catalyst for developing and manufacturing the vaccines being used to protect millions of Americans. However, as a leader in the health care industry, the state's rollout has fallen short of such high standards. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to address the most dire issues currently facing the Commonwealth's COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and for your continued efforts on behalf of the entire Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Neal

Chairman

House Ways and Means Committee

REN/jc