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February 24, 2021

Ms. Alison Beam, Acting Secretary
PA Department of Health
625 Forster Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

RE: COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

Dear Acting Secretary Beam:

We respectfully request the Department of Health change its Phase 1A category to include teachers and school personnel; corrections officers and staff; and limit smokers to only those 65 and older. This change in prioritization will truly put our seniors and high-risk workers at the top of the list and allow at-risk smokers to still receive the vaccine.

Healthcare organizations have been overwhelmed since the Department of Health made the decision to permit anyone over 65 and those with preexisting conditions into the Phase 1A category. This decision was made without notifying these organizations or giving them time to prepare to meet their communities' needs.

As institutions struggle to meet the extremely high demand for the vaccine in Phase 1A, we're baffled why the Department of Health would prioritize young adult smokers in the same classification as our seniors and high-risk populations. It is our understanding this is not under federal recommendations, but a state decision that must be reevaluated.

Pennsylvania has one of the highest populations over 65 in the entire country, and to give young smokers equal prioritization is a disservice to our seniors.

The addition of young smokers in Phase 1A is an insult to our teachers and school personnel, as well as corrections officers and staff that have been forced to wait until Phase 1B despite their necessity of close congregate work. They should have access to immunizations before young people that chose to smoke.

While we recognize the number of vaccines is dependent upon federal allocations, Pennsylvania is not effectively communicating with our healthcare institutions. It is impossible for our hospitals and community health clinics to schedule vaccine appointments without knowing how many vaccines they can expect, or when they will arrive. These institutions are on the ground-level and begging for assistance with little acknowledgement from the Department of Health. It is imperative that those actually getting the doses into arms know when and how many they can prepare. It is absolutely unacceptable that they continue to guess and be left in the dark until a shipment arrives.

Pennsylvanians and healthcare providers are disappointed and frustrated with the vaccine rollout process and the legislature would like to be a part of a solution with the Department of Health that more efficiently distributes the vaccine and communicates its availability.

We are committed to making their voices heard and improving the system so that people can receive this lifesaving medicine more quickly and efficiently. We ask that you please improve communication with providers across the commonwealth so that those on the frontlines have the resources they need to vaccinate Pennsylvanians.

Sincerely,



Pam Snyder, Member
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50th Legislative District



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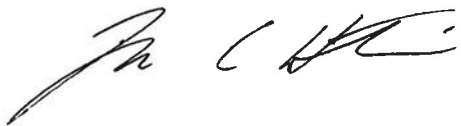
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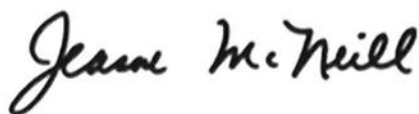
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