

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

January 28, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Norris Cochran

Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Ave SW

Washington, D.C. 20201

President Biden, and Acting Secretary of Health Cochran –

I write today to share my constituents' concerns about COVID-19 vaccine distribution, and to emphasize the urgent need for the rapid deployment of a national strategy for the manufacture and distribution of these vaccines. The absence of a strategic national plan, when combined with misinformation promulgated by the former administration, have created widespread frustration and anxiety as state and local governments try to stand up vaccine distribution, and individuals seek to protect themselves and their families.

It is now clear that the Trump administration's piecemeal vaccine efforts were woefully insufficient. Although the rapid development of at least two effective vaccines spurred hope of ending the pandemic sooner rather than later, the failure to provide a comprehensive plan or resources to deliver vaccines to the public has led to a widespread criticism of vaccine distribution in recent days.

It has become clear that the outgoing administration overpromised supplies of vaccines to the states, while simultaneously placing the financial and logistical burdens of distributing those vaccines to the public on the states. As a result, state and local governments and health systems have had to continually readjust distribution plans as allotment numbers promised by the Federal Government [failed to materialize](#). This has increased confusion and distrust of the vaccine process and is damaging roll out efforts.

My constituents in Pennsylvania's 5th Congressional District are feeling the burden of this confusion. Slow vaccine rollout has forced the commonwealth to decide, with little federal input, which vulnerable communities to prioritize for vaccination – a difficult task given Pennsylvania's complex and diverse population. On the whole, the commonwealth has one of the

largest elderly populations in the United States, with nearly 20% of residents being [over the age of 65](#). Additionally, my district has large Black and minority communities, as well as an extensive nursing home and healthcare workforce. Each of these populations needs immediate access to the COVID-19 vaccine, but again, because of the lack of federal coordination, there simply isn't enough to go around.

For months, we have been advocating for the federal government to assess supply shortages in COVID-19 management and to use the Defense Production Act to immediately begin filling these gaps – vaccine production and distribution process being just one of the many areas where similar attention is warranted. Therefore, we are heartened that your administration has issued Executive orders to assess the current vaccine supply and distribution system, invoke the DPA to address those supply chain issues, and establish FEMA vaccination centers and the [COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force](#) (amongst others). I look forward to these steps helping to ensure that my constituents receive the COVID-19 vaccine in a timely and effective manner.

In determining vaccine allocation to states and localities, we request that your administration weight vaccine allotments with attention to the number of vulnerable individuals within these jurisdictions and not simply by total population. This way, communities like mine, with a larger than average share of healthcare workers, and minority and elderly Americans are not left competing against one another for a scarce resource they all should have priority in accessing.

With attention to increasing supply and proper allocation of vaccines, in addition to proven public health practices and messaging, I believe we will finally make headway in curbing the COVID-19 pandemic and moving both our national health and economy to recovery. I look forward to working with your administration to ensure this happens.

Sincerely,



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress