



The Legislature of the State of Texas

January 25, 2021

Dr. John Hellerstedt, Commissioner
Texas Department of State Health Services
P.O. Box 149347
Austin, Texas 78714-9347

Delivered Electronically

Dear Commissioner Hellerstedt:

Thank you for your continued leadership in Texas and for your commitment to all Texans' health and well-being, especially at this critical time. The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines has been Texans' first real beacon of medical hope since this pandemic began. Vaccine distribution, however, has been riddled with obstacles and difficulties that must be overcome to protect our most vulnerable citizens. As members of the Bexar County delegation we write to express our perspective that we must dramatically increase transparency and infrastructure to support the efficient distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Although hospitals are doing as much as they can to vaccinate as many people as possible, even Texas' immense medical centers cannot carry out this effort alone. We believe it is unrealistic to ask them to manage the surging number of critical COVID-19 cases, care for their other patients, and organize and administer the vaccines—all while protecting their staff from the virus.

Vaccine administrators and healthcare providers expect and deserve efficient assistance from our state government, including the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) timely sharing its goals and expectations for vaccine distribution and implementing a process to answer quickly questions from medical providers. Because they reportedly are unclear about who is responsible for answering their questions, we can substantially ease the load on providers and clinics throughout the state by explaining and improving the system.

We recommend that, working with city coordinators, vaccines continue to be distributed to private practice and community clinics, not only to large hospitals. This would help alleviate the situation resulting from COVID-19 infections and their associated symptoms being disproportionately higher in communities of color, typically being localized in more socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, experiencing higher comorbidity rates, and having much more limited access to healthcare.

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The pandemic has exacerbated the devastating effects of this decreased healthcare access. If equitable and efficient vaccine distribution is a priority, it is crucial to recognize the specific barriers to healthcare access in these communities. We must help them overcome obstacles such as lack of transportation, language barriers, low health literacy, and susceptibility to misinformation.

We would appreciate your immediate attention to this important matter. If you would like to discuss these issues with us, please do not hesitate to let us know. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,



Ina Minjarez
State Representative
House District 124



Roland Gutierrez
State Senator
Senate District 19



Judith Zaffirini
State Senator
Senate District 21



Steve Allison
State Representative
House District 121



Diego Bernal
State Representative
House District 123



Elizabeth Campos
State Representative
House District 119



Philip Cortez
State Representative
House District 117



Barbara Gervin-Hawkins
State Representative
House District 120



Ray Lopez
State Representative
House District 125



Trey Martinez-Fischer
State Representative
House District 116



Leo Pacheco
State Representative
House District 118