



February 11, 2021

The Honorable Mike Doyle  
U.S. House of Representatives  
270 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Doyle:

I write today to convey our county's experience with pandemic response and vaccination efforts. As the federal government turns its attention to ramping up efforts in that response, and providing additional relief to our nation, it seemed appropriate to share with you our experience in Allegheny County and our needs.

Allegheny County saw its first confirmed case of COVID last March. We immediately took steps to mitigate spread by asking our residents and businesses to stay home. Although we understood how impactful that would be, our community also wasn't prepared to protect itself. There were many unknowns, a lack of personal protective equipment and limited testing capacity. Like we often do, this community came together and quickly was able to address those needs, allowing us to loosen up some of those mitigation strategies. We saw a second surge, with substantial deaths, in November but also were relieved to see vaccines moving forward. The first vaccine in our region arrived in late December as a shipment of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to our local health systems. The Health Department received its first shipment of Moderna vaccine on December 22 and began putting it in arms on December 23.

Since that time, there have been 251,500 doses of vaccine delivered to providers in Allegheny County. The over 100 providers include hospitals, pharmacies, federally qualified health centers, physicians and other medical professionals, and dialysis centers. The county Health Department has received approximately 11% of those doses (71,000) and yet finds itself in a position to fill the gap for residents who aren't being served elsewhere. Unfortunately, due to the lack of vaccine available, that number continues to grow. We currently have no way to meet that demand.

There are two main needs as it relates to vaccine distribution – first, we need more vaccine. I'm sure this is a common refrain throughout the country. Allegheny County has approximately 1.2 million residents and an estimated 1 million are over the age of 16 and eligible for vaccine. We also estimate that there are at least 350,000 residents which fall into Phase 1A of vaccination, as defined by the Pennsylvania

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Department of Health. As already noted, vaccine providers in the county have only received 250,000 vaccines to date and, as you can imagine, those in other phases of vaccination are also anxious for their turn. There is limited local control of distribution, but the Health Department has focused on its own supply and, with its efforts, has worked to address vaccine hesitancy and concerns and balance that with the need to ensure the equity of distribution.

We understand that the manufacturing piece of this takes some time to ramp up. If Johnson + Johnson/Jansen receives emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration, having a third vaccine available will also relieve some of that pressure. But we also need predictability. We cannot offer additional vaccine at our current Point of Dispensing (POD) or move forward in opening other sites throughout the county if we do not know what vaccine we can expect to receive. We cannot take teams into senior housing to meet that need without vaccine. We cannot work with community groups to provide vaccines to the people of color or those experiencing homelessness for which they advocate if we do not have it.

Finally, as it relates to our community, I truly believe that the federal relief should be targeted specifically at those who have been most impacted by the pandemic. These are the individuals who work at restaurants, are housekeepers in our local hotels, and the ushers or concession stand operations in our many hospitality and tourism businesses. While I certainly believe that every attempt should be made to assist these business owners as well, the real harm and impact are on those who hold the most basic and often, most important, jobs at these businesses who do not have an opportunity to recover.

I do not envy you, or your colleagues, the task of determining how best to provide relief to those most in need, and in coming to a consensus on that plan. We are greatly appreciative of your efforts and stand ready to answer any questions you may have or provide you with additional detail and information that may be helpful to you in your discussions and deliberations.

Sincerely,

  
Rich Fitzgerald