

January 21, 2021

MEMBER
JURISDICTIONS

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

CHESAPEAKE

FRANKLIN

RE: COVID-19 Vaccinations in Hampton Roads

GLOUCESTER

Dear Governor Northam:

HAMPTON

On behalf of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) which represents 17 local governments and 1.7 million residents in the Hampton Roads region, we respectfully request your immediate assistance to increase the rate of vaccinations within our region. We are very concerned that the Commonwealth of Virginia currently ranks very low as compared to other states in the per capita rollout of vaccinations. Based on input from our localities, and the number of vaccines being made available to our communities, we estimate it would take at least 12 to 16 months for the population of Hampton Roads to be vaccinated. We can all agree that this is not acceptable.

ISLE OF WIGHT

JAMES CITY

NEWPORT NEWS

NORFOLK

Our 17 local governments in the Hampton Roads region stand ready to assist you in this effort. Our cities and counties have available staff that can administer vaccinations and can also offer spaces as clinics to administer large-scale vaccinations. We are mobilized and ready to move very quickly, but we need your assistance and the support of the Virginia Department of Health to provide our localities the necessary authority to offer this assistance. We need agreements in place to open clinics and allow for our local government staffs to be able to administer the vaccine to our residents. Our City Managers and County Administrators are available to meet with you and your staff to discuss the mobilization of these efforts.

POQUOSON

PORTSMOUTH

SMITHFIELD

SOUTHAMPTON

SUFFOLK

To make this effort successful, we want to raise the following issues that must be addressed:

SURRY

VIRGINIA BEACH

1. It is clear that each Health District is approaching this effort in an inconsistent manner which is causing confusion and frustration across our region. While we understand operational flexibility, this approach where each Health District establishes its own policies is not serving our community well. This situation has created vast inconsistencies across our region regarding who is included in various phases, and how quickly they are being

WILLIAMSBURG

YORK

vaccinated. The ability of residents to receive vaccinations should not be based on the Health District in which they are located, but should be based on their need for vaccines as established by the criteria provided by the Department of Health.

2. The previous issue leads to a major concern about equity. We are concerned that if the vaccination program continues on its current path, many of our lower income, disadvantaged populations could have less access to vaccines due to the Health District in which they may be located. We must ensure vaccinations are delivered to geographic areas based on need and that all of our residents have fair and equitable access based on Department of Health guidelines.
3. We believe this pandemic has illustrated that our Health Districts have been underfunded and are currently stretched very thin without the resources and structure to respond to this crisis in a timely manner. We respectfully request that you consider engaging the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) in this effort. VDEM has broad experience in successfully responding to emergencies, which we believe could provide valuable strategic oversight for this state-wide vaccination effort.
4. We request the Commonwealth provide clear guidance to its Health Districts to stratify and prioritize personnel who should be considered in the Phase 1(b) vaccination effort. Again, we note that there are different interpretations and policies across our Health Districts in Hampton Roads, and it is critical that a consistent approach be established.
5. After these clarifications are made, it is critical that a public information campaign occur to convey a clear and consistent message to our residents. This campaign should be very clear, providing basic information on the Who, Where and When of the vaccination program.
6. As we increase the rate of vaccinations in our region, we need to insure adequate resources and staffing to support COVID testing at our public health districts
7. As of this writing, it is our understanding that approximately 1/3 of the vaccines distributed in Virginia have actually been administered. We need to ensure that our limited supplies of vaccines are administered as quickly as possible. To ensure the vaccines are administered in a more expedient manner, protocol should be established that ties vaccine distribution numbers to those localities that can produce maximum through-put while providing immediate assistance to health districts not able to distribute their proportionate share by providing additional VDH resources or locality support. Once distribution systems are in place in those districts that are behind, vaccine distribution can be increased above their proportionate share until their areas are matching percentages in other parts of the Commonwealth.

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam

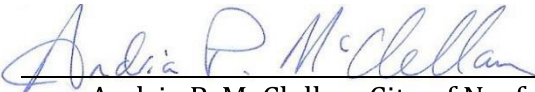
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8. It is critical that our Health Districts reinforce and strengthen their partnerships with our region's major health care providers to increase the vaccination rollout and request your assistance in this regard.
9. Many of our local governments have prioritized support of the vaccine rollout as priority #1, and have re-appropriated funding from other important efforts to support local vaccination efforts. Our localities are recording and documenting these costs, and request the Commonwealth consider a reimbursement program to offset these unbudgeted expenses.
10. It is our understanding that many of our active duty and retired military personnel and their families are successfully obtaining vaccines through the military. Since active/retired military personnel and their families represent over 300,000 people in Hampton Roads, this is very positive news. However, we are not clear if our vaccination numbers include the military and their families who have successfully acquired their vaccine. Your help in clarifying this question is much appreciated.
11. We want to restate the willingness of our 17 local governments to assist the Commonwealth, Department of Health and local Health Districts in this effort. We are sure there are many other localities across Virginia that stand ready to assist you as well. Mr. Governor, we respectfully recommend you appoint a small committee of six to eight City Managers/County Administrators from across Virginia to meet with you on a weekly basis to provide recommendations to improve the rate of vaccine rollouts in Virginia. We strongly believe that the advice of these professional public administrators will be very valuable to you in this effort. We request that one to two members of this professional manager group be from the Hampton Roads region.

In conclusion, we appreciate your dedication and leadership as the Commonwealth of Virginia addresses this unprecedented challenge. We appreciate your consideration of our comments and look forward to working with you to improve the rate of vaccinations across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Sincerely,



Andria P. McClellan, City of Norfolk
Chair



David H. Jenkins, City of Newport News
Vice Chair

copy: Hampton Roads General Assembly Members
Dr. Danny TK Avula
HRPDC Commissioners