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MAYOR

City of Virginia Beach

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January 13, 2021

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

Dear Governor Northam:

On Friday, Virginia Beach City Manager Patrick Duhaney is scheduled to meet with Dr. Danny Avula to work through a host of questions and concerns we are experiencing with the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. I have attached the letter that Dr. Avula received from our region's chief administrative officers detailing the specific issues we are facing. In anticipation of that meeting, I am writing to request your support and intervention into what has been an extremely frustrating and disappointing vaccination program to date.

From confusing and even contradictory information to a lack of Health Department staffing, and from an insufficient supply chain to inconsistencies in the distribution process, we are facing serious obstacles to doing what is our number one priority: vaccinating our residents, especially the most vulnerable among us, so we can save lives, free up hospital beds and get our economy moving again. We just need direct access to the vaccine.

Last summer, we demonstrated our ability to reopen the beaches in Virginia Beach in a responsible way. As you noted then, our plan was a model for others to follow. I urge you to extend to us that same consideration now as we face this ever-growing threat from the pandemic. The Virginia Beach City Council affirmed its commitment to this cause and has made it a funding and staffing priority. We have a plan and the experience, infrastructure, capabilities and personnel necessary to effectively and efficiently vaccinate our population. Gaining direct access to the vaccine and taking responsibility for the vaccination program here would enable your office and the Department of Health to concentrate efforts in the areas of the state that do not have our resources.

As medical professionals, I believe we share the same concerns about the toll this pandemic has taken on our citizens. Aside from the financial strain on businesses and families, the increasing cases of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and depression and the inability to return

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students to school are exacerbating an already difficult health crisis. We can expedite the healing by granting the City of Virginia Beach independent responsibility for the Vaccinate Virginia Beach program.

I am available at your convenience should you want to discuss the options available to us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bobby Dyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bobby" being more prominent than the last name "Dyer".

Robert M. "Bobby" Dyer
Mayor, City of Virginia Beach

c: Members of Virginia Beach City Council
Patrick Duhaney, City Manager

Attachment



MEMBER JURISDICTIONS

January 12, 2021

CHESAPEAKE

Dr. M. Norman Oliver
Virginia State Health Commissioner
Via email: norm.oliver@vdh.virginia.gov

FRANKLIN

GLOUCESTER

Dr. Danny TK Avula
Richmond-Henrico Health Director
Via email: danny.avula@vdh.virginia.gov

HAMPTON

ISLE OF WIGHT

Dear Dr. Oliver and Dr. Avula:

JAMES CITY

On behalf of the 17 local government City Managers and County Administrators in the Hampton Roads region, we request the Commonwealth of Virginia's assistance to help our local governments more efficiently plan and execute a timely COVID-19 vaccination plan with the Virginia Department of Health and our healthcare partners in our region.

NEWPORT NEWS

NORFOLK

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a tremendous challenge for us all. To maximize our effectiveness, we must all pull together our resources, talents and energy to vaccinate our public as fast as possible. If we wait for the health district resources alone, it will take much longer for us to achieve our common goal. As 17 local governments representing over 1.7 million people in the Hampton Roads region, we are able and willing to help in this effort. Many of us are able to provide emergency management personnel, school nurses and/or jail medical staff to supplement the Virginia Department of Health's staff capacity.

POQUOSON

PORTSMOUTH

SMITHFIELD

SOUTHAMPTON

SUFFOLK

We appreciate Dr. Avula agreeing to meet with a subcommittee of our regional managers and administrators on Friday, January 15th at 4:00 PM. To make this meeting as productive as possible, we wanted to share the following information in advance, describing where we need support to allow us to assist the Commonwealth in this critical effort.

SURRY

VIRGINIA BEACH

1. ***First, and foremost, we need the approval of your offices to permit trained medical staff to participate in the vaccination program.*** As we understand it, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be signed between the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), local health districts and localities. Many of us have submitted our signed MOUs, along with the support of our Operational Medical Directors (OMD), but we await the health district signature. Immediate signatures will enable

WILLIAMSBURG

YORK

us to deploy EMS to help. Moreover, some localities and school districts have partnered to also train school nurses. However, those school nurses need an OMD to supervise them as well. We have asked our health district teams about sponsoring the school nurses, but await answers. Your help in getting the MOUs signed and OMD oversight from the health districts could make a huge difference.


2. ***If the State were able and willing to provide liability protection for our localities and staff, we could likely expand the use of our EMS providers and school nurses from just vaccinating the Essential 1B city, county and school employees to the broader population.*** Currently, our local OMDs for our Fire/EMS departments have signed off on a VDH MOU which permits specific EMS providers (EMT-Intermediates and Paramedics) who have been trained to provide COVID-19 vaccines to do so as part of a Health Department or Health System Vaccine Program. The MOU specifies that the agency OMD will train the agency vaccinators and allow them to participate in the vaccination program, and approves a vaccination protocol which outlines the requirements for their administration of the vaccine. The MOU thus makes the Health System or Health Department responsible for being the “Prescriber”, to obtain and store the vaccine, manage the administrative processes and all reporting. However, some local municipal attorneys and OMDs are only willing to authorize the use of these staff for municipal and school districts at this time, but we believe a statewide order/protocol ensuring liability protection would allow these vaccinators to help the general public as well.
3. ***We are looking for a stream-lined process for qualifying nurses and other eligible vaccinators. We are hearing that potential vaccinators are being asked to sign up as a Medical Reserve Corps volunteer.*** However, there are many requirements to do so, and many are not necessary to be a vaccinator. We are seeking a temporary waiver for the non-essential requirements to more quickly facilitate the registration of additional vaccinators. Another possibility would be for VDH to allow nurses or other qualified healthcare professionals to certify and work under our hospital systems’ emergency credentialing to allow them to vaccinate.
4. ***We are also seeking breakdowns in vaccination administration by health district on the statewide dashboard so that we can understand how many people in our communities are being vaccinated.*** We also request data on how many vaccinators we currently have in each of our local health districts and the breakdown on whether they are federal, state or local employees and/or volunteers. There appears to be major differences across the state. In some areas, districts are already moving into 1B while others (including some in our region) report that only half of the 1A category has been vaccinated. We are particularly concerned that more well-funded districts appear to be making faster progress than those with fewer resources. We are concerned about social equity impacts if this is indeed the case. Allowing for the municipal support described above should help, but it is not fair to penalize residents of health districts with less staff support with slower response times.

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5. ***Related to equity, we request that you and your team focus on how we ensure equity to high risk, socially vulnerable populations as the vaccine is rolled out.*** Localities can also be of assistance in helping to reach and educate our vulnerable residents if we are engaged.
6. ***How does VDH intend to manage mass registration of people that want to receive a vaccine?*** (This is related to the comments on Thursday where VDH mentioned the need for a call center and a database)
7. ***To what extent will VDH be tapping into hospital systems, pharmacies, the Virginia National Guard and other entities to administer vaccinations at a broader community level?*** How quickly will these partnerships get established and implemented?
8. ***Is there any funding available to offset locality costs for assisting in the vaccination process?***
9. ***How will discrepancies in Tiers between VDH's plan and local operational needs be handled?*** (for example, VDH lists Water Treatment staff as 1C but to a local government these staff are critical to public health, safety and welfare)
10. ***Are there plans for VDH meetings with local/regional public information officers to formulate one consistent message on vaccination priorities and distribution?***
11. ***Are there any supply chain issues that local governments will have to work to solve for the vaccination plan to work? Can localities assist with the procurement of these supplies?***

In summary, we stand ready to assist the Commonwealth to address this critical public health challenge, but we need your help. We look forward to our upcoming meeting with Dr. Avula later this week, where we can share and discuss these ideas and specific needs with him. In the meantime, we wanted to share with you our offer to help and ask for expedited consideration of the above requests. We look forward to working with your team!

Sincerely,


Mary Bunting, Hampton City Manager
Chair, Hampton Roads Chief
Administrative Officers


Michael Johnson, Southampton County Administrator
Vice Chair, Hampton Roads Chief
Administrative Officers

copy: Hampton Roads Chief Administrative Officers