

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

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January 18, 2021

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

As the Senator representing the largest city in the Commonwealth, I am outraged by the disrespectful treatment extended toward the City of Virginia Beach, and specifically, our mayor. In a recent communication with Mayor Dyer and Virginia Beach City Council, your Chief of Staff Clark Mercer did not mince words. I can only hope he was acting unilaterally, as he is prone to do. Clark chastised our leadership for daring to criticize your rollout of the COVID-19 Vaccine—which by all accounts, has been nothing short of abysmal.

As of this weekend, Virginia is ranked 48th in the nation for getting the vaccines into the arms of our citizens. There is truly no excuse for this. You have blamed our president, our hospitals and our cities, when in fact other states have been widely successful under the same conditions. There was plenty of time to prepare. We have known for months that a vaccine was on its way. Why did you wait until a month into vaccinations to appoint a czar? That should have been done 6 months ago.

This is not the first time the Commonwealth has been near-bottom. As the pandemic has progressed, Virginia not only ranked poorly in COVID testing, but among the worst states for getting unemployment benefits into the wallets of our citizens. Now the dismal rollout of the vaccine. People are floundering. People are desperate. For someone who purports to help the public, your efforts have been appalling.

Why are we not running a 24-hour, 7 day-a-week operation to administer these vaccines? Why were we not ready to distribute this vaccine? The hard work has already been done. Scientists miraculously developed a lifesaving vaccine in record time. The pharmaceutical industry made it possible to manufacture and deliver it. And yet, your administration was completely unprepared to get the shots into peoples' arms.

The one thing that has been constant from the beginning is you. All of these failures have happened on your watch. You have been consistent in your inability to take responsibility. You deflect. You blame others. You always have an excuse. Leadership begins at the top, Governor. It is time to look in the mirror and acknowledge your faults.

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Ultimately, Virginians who could have been saved will die because your administration failed to prepare for this moment. Virginia Beach specifically will suffer because of your vindictive actions.

In his email, Clark implied retribution for my recent lawsuit and other comments made during the pandemic, insinuating Virginia Beach is being punished for my actions. How wrong could this possibly be? Have you and your office no shame? Withholding the vaccine from thousands of people is tantamount to a death sentence and most certainly goes against the Hippocratic Oath, the most sacred of vows for any physician. As the only governor in our country who is also a doctor, how could you fail your citizenry so miserably?

Governor, I implore you to work collaboratively with Virginia Beach as you have with other cities in the Commonwealth, to ensure the safety and security of our citizens. That is what you are tasked to do. That was why you were elected. You must do better.

Warm regards,



Bill DeSteph