

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

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January 20, 2021

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

Dear Governor Northam:

As we continue to confront COVID-19 here in the Commonwealth, the largest and most populated city in Virginia has still not transitioned to Phase 1B. In fact, Hampton Roads is the only region in the state still in 1A. This is not because we aren't ready; and not because there aren't enough doses available for them to do so. As you know, Virginia Beach indeed has the infrastructure and supplies ready to go. We are still in 1A because we are waiting on you.

Two weeks ago, the Surgeon General told the states and governors to move quickly to other priority groups, noting, "if the demand isn't there in 1A, then go to 1B, and continue on down." Yet still, Virginia Beach sits in Phase 1A, waiting.

The City of Virginia Beach has developed a portal which has been tested to facilitate the registration process for residents eligible for vaccination under Phase 1B. The City Manager has declared that as soon as the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) authorizes the transition to 1B it is ready to go.

So why is the largest city in Virginia still in 1A? We have everything we need to administer the vaccine. The numbers on the VDH's website suggest that there are currently over a half-million doses distributed throughout the state and ready to be used. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar said, "Every vaccine dose sitting in a warehouse rather than going into an arm could mean one more death that could have been avoided."

The federal government is supplying the states with the vaccine. It is the responsibility of the states to distribute the vaccine. If the states do not administer the supply they are given, the federal government will divert that supply to states that can efficiently administer the vaccine. We were told that we would receive 110,000 doses of the vaccine each week, but according to the VDH's website, Virginia has not received any doses since January 13th. Is that because we have 583,349 sitting in a warehouse somewhere, waiting to be used?

Governor, I implore you. No more excuses. No more explanations. We need results. We need leadership. We need action. The Commonwealth is depending on you. I welcome an opportunity to meet and discuss how we may best serve the citizens of Virginia as we navigate this crisis.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill DeSteph".

Bill DeSteph