



DAVID I. WEPRIN
MEMBER OF ASSEMBLY
24TH DISTRICT

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Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force
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October 28, 2020

Honorable Anthony Annucci
Acting Commissioner
NYS Department of Corrections & Community Supervision
The Harriman State Campus, Building 2
1220 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12226-2050

Dear Commissioner Annucci,

Thank you for your ongoing attention to the COVID – 19 pandemic in relation to its spread and control in New York State’s Correctional Facilities. As you know, we appreciate the efforts the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision has made thus far to limit the spread of novel coronavirus, however we write to you today in regards to the matter of flu vaccine availability in our state prisons.

In your testimony to the New York State Senate on September 22, it was noted that the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision has accounted for only 13,000 flu vaccines for the upcoming flu season, with 3,000 on hand on the date of the hearing. While we appreciate that the department has secured these vaccines for the population, we are concerned with the amount of vaccines procured, considering that the state currently responsible for the care and custody of 36,263 incarcerated individuals. Although we understand that this is not the first flu season that the department has faced and has experience providing medical care to individuals in custody; we are now headed into uncharted waters, where the global COVID-19 pandemic will intersect with the annual flu season. Recent studies show that the novel coronavirus and the seasonal flu are very similar to each other in regards to symptoms shown, and furthermore, in the way by which they spread. Being airborne viruses, both spread with rapidity and vigor in confined spaces and a correctional facility, particularly those in cold environments like many of New York’s prisons, would be an opportune place for these diseases to spread in the fall and winter.

Considering the above, as well as the lack of a complete understanding of the novel coronavirus at this time especially in regards to the effects it has had on individuals in custody of the department, we are gravely concerned that the lack of available flu vaccines for incarcerated individuals will have a devastating and unnecessary impact in our state’s correctional facilities. Furthermore, a substantial outbreak in our state prison system will not only place incarcerated individuals at risk, but the communities surrounding these facilities. We cannot allow COVID-19 outbreaks occur within and from within prisons.

In response to our concerns, we ask that you answer the following questions as soon as possible:

1. How many flu vaccines does the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision currently have on hand for incarcerated individuals?
2. Does the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision anticipate receiving enough vaccines to provide a dose to all incarcerated individuals who request one with consent? If so, when do the department anticipate reaching that inventory level?
3. If the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision is unable to obtain enough vaccines, how will the department determine who is eligible?
4. Does the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision have a comprehensive plan to control both the transmission of the flu and COVID-19 that includes comprehensive and consistent testing of incarcerated individuals for COVID-19? Does this plan include antibody testing of incarcerated individuals?

Thank you to your attention to the above and once again, for your ongoing work to safeguard those in the State’s custody during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

David I. Weprin
Chair, Assembly Committee on Correction

Luis R. Sepúlveda
Chair, Senate Committee on Crime, Crime Victims and Correction

Cc: Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

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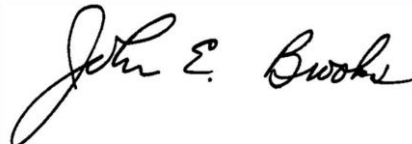
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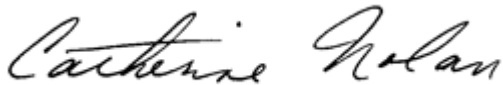
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