

THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



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February 17, 2021

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.  
NYS Department of Health, Commissioner  
Corning Tower  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, NY 12237

Re: URGENT Changes Needed to Ensure Vaccinations in Nursing Homes

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Zucker:

As the federal Operation Warp Speed program to administer COVID-19 vaccine doses to nursing homes through partnerships with CVS and Walgreens pharmacies winds down, I am writing to you with the urgent request that the State expeditiously develop a plan to ensure residents and staffers at nursing homes in New York State can continue to be prioritized for receiving first and second doses of the vaccine. As you know, the program included three clinical days for nursing home residents and staffers to receive vaccinations, however many of these facilities have already completed their three clinics, and the rest will be completed shortly. With the clinical days complete, my office is receiving reports from residents who have been admitted to these facilities after the third clinical day who are being told they will not receive the vaccine. Knowing that these residents are particularly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19, we must continue to make them—and the staff who cares for them—are a top priority when it comes to vaccinations, and the state simply cannot afford any delay in establishing an effective plan to ensure they are vaccinated despite the completion of the federal program. While you have said that they will have access to these vaccinations through the local health departments, we are hearing from residents who were expressly told they would not receive the vaccine, so if this is simply a communication issue between the state, the local governments, or the facilities themselves, I ask that that issue be resolved immediately.

From the very start of this pandemic, we have known that the elderly are among the most vulnerable to this deadly virus, however to date, the State is still yet to take sufficient action to ensure their health and safety. Furthermore, while it may have been understandable for New York—like many other states and the country as a whole—to initially be caught off-guard with respect to the pandemic, we have known for months that the

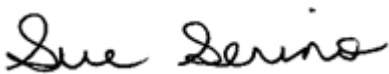
State would need to implement an aggressive and efficient vaccination rollout upon the development of a vaccine, yet the vaccine rollout to this point has been a major source of confusion and frustration for many New Yorkers. Now the State is again at a point where we can clearly foresee an upcoming problem, and we must take immediate action to address it.

New Yorkers across all walks of life have been struggling to schedule vaccine appointments, with challenges arising from difficulty in finding available appointments or encountering broken links, and struggles in finding transportation to and from these appointments, which in some cases may be over 100 miles away. As much as these issues are a challenge for anyone, they can be far more challenging for seniors who may be computer illiterate or unable to travel even much shorter distances. In light of these realities and the increased vulnerability of nursing home residents, a focused and continuing effort to ensure all nursing home residents and staff who want a vaccine are able to receive it in a practical and convenient manner is an absolute must.

We are not out of the woods with this pandemic yet, and there are still cases of COVID-19 in our nursing home and residents are still incredibly vulnerable. You recently announced that the State would be reallocating unused vaccine doses from nursing homes to the State's general program, but I implore you to ensure doses and appointments remain available to nursing homes, particularly as new residents and staffers enter the home who did not have an option to participate in the previous clinics, or as others who initially declined to receive the vaccine change their mind and wish to be vaccinated. The State's responsibility to protect our most vulnerable residents cannot be limited to three clinical days—it must be an on-going effort until the threat of this virus has been eliminated.

I appreciate your immediate attention to this matter, and I look forward to working together to ensure that every New Yorker who wishes to receive the vaccine has the opportunity to access it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Serino".

Senator Sue Serino  
41<sup>st</sup> District