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February 2, 2021

W. Marshall Taylor, Jr. Acting Director
Department of Health and Environmental Control
2600 Bull Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

RE: Follow up from January 21, 2021, House Legislative Oversight Ad Hoc Committee Meeting

Dear Mr. Taylor:

The effectiveness and efficiency of the Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC or the agency) current process for receipt and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine must improve as the vaccine is a life-saving resource to our state and nation. The mission of the House Legislative Oversight Committee is for South Carolina agencies to become, and continuously remain, the most effective state agencies in the country through processes which eliminate waste and efficiently deploy resources, thereby creating greater confidence in state government.

As evident from our Thursday, January 21, 2021, meeting, it is imperative that steps be taken to improve public confidence in DHEC's receipt and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. On behalf of my colleagues on the ad hoc committee, we appreciate DHEC's participation in the meeting on short notice. Discussion of these important issues for six hours in a public venue was a necessary step on the road to improve public confidence. Additionally, the ad hoc committee appreciates all of the representatives from stakeholder associations that rearranged their schedules on short notice to participate. We encourage the agency's collaboration with these stakeholder associations in its efforts to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and, ultimately, public confidence in the vaccine rollout.

In the week following the meeting, the House of Representatives approved legislation, H.3707, which addresses many of the concerns noted by House members: allocation of the vaccine; expanding the range of medical professionals that can administer the vaccine; and daily reporting on DHEC's website about the vaccine rollout.

The purpose of this letter is to follow up on some issues related to the vaccine rollout of interest to various members of the ad hoc committee. The agency's responses will be posted online for transparency to the public. Accordingly, please do not

provide any information that may not be posted online due to legal or contract prohibitions or that may jeopardize the life, health, or safety of anyone.

Vaccine Distribution

1. Please provide a detailed explanation of the recent DHEC board decision pertaining to vaccine allocation including: (a) information being gathered to present at the next board meeting, and (b) issues on which the agency anticipates the board may make decisions related to vaccine allocation and rollout at the next meeting.

DHEC representatives testified the agency has the authority to move categories of individuals between phases and prioritize them within a particular phase.

2. What is the process for determining if certain categories of individuals (e.g., teachers, support staff, day care workers, mental health counselors, etc.) should be moved to a different phase?
3. Has the agency made any changes to the prioritization of individuals to receive the vaccine since the meeting?
4. Are providers permitted to allow any person, regardless of phase eligibility, to receive the vaccine to avoid waste?

Communication with providers is essential to an effective vaccine administrative process. There has been confusion among many providers about the second dose of vaccine and how it is managed at the federal level. After the meeting, confusion appears to continue among providers about access to the second dose of the vaccine as some second dose appointments have been canceled.

5. What communication has DHEC given to providers to help them understand this process? Please provide any communications sent to providers regarding this issue.
6. What safeguards are in place to guarantee that if someone receives a first dose that a second dose will be available?
7. Does the agency have a mechanism for contacting individuals who have not returned for their second dose?

Effectively distributing and administering the vaccine is a complex logistical undertaking.

8. Has the agency partnered with or hired logistical consultants to assist with the development of the agency's vaccine distribution strategy? If so, please identify these partners or consultants, as well as the services or expertise they provide.

Testimony was received indicating the willingness of physicians and independent pharmacists to participate in the vaccine rollout. Additionally, testimony was received that more than 80% of the state's population is within five miles of an independent pharmacy's physical location or delivery area.

9. Has the agency included local physicians and independent pharmacies in its vaccine distribution strategy? If so, please explain the phase in which they will participate.
10. What assistance will the agency provide to help these local providers acquire the capability to distribute the vaccine?
11. What would be needed to authorize/equip more private physicians and independent pharmacies to administer the Pfizer vaccine?

Many South Carolinians are homebound and are unable to reach vaccine administration locations.

12. Does the agency have a vaccination strategy for homebound residents? If so, please outline that process.

13. Does the existing registration process allow residents to identify themselves as “homebound”?
14. Does DHEC have an estimate of the number of people who may fall into this category?

Improving Public Outreach

Many residents of the state would like to support vaccination efforts through volunteerism.

15. How should residents with clinical and administrative expertise offer their services to DHEC?
16. Does the agency have a web based system for volunteers to register?

Communication with the public requires a multi-pronged approach due to the broad demographic that should be reached regarding the vaccine.

17. In regards to public outreach,
- a. What is the agency’s marketing strategy, which media platforms are currently being used to communicate with the public, and what audience does the agency seek to reach thorough each?
 - b. Please list the types of type of information currently being shared through each of these platforms (e.g., registration, vaccine side effects, etc.)?
 - c. How is the agency evaluating the effectiveness (i.e., metrics) of its media strategy, especially to rural and underserved populations?

As time is of the essence, please provide this information by the close of business on Tuesday, February 9, 2021. We anticipate much of this information is readily available to the agency, but if additional time is necessary to provide specific information, please let me know, in writing, what information and why. While responding to these questions may advance public confidence in the process, response to these questions should be a parallel or secondary task to ongoing vaccine distribution efforts.

Thank you for your cooperation with the legislative oversight process and service to the people of South Carolina.

Sincerely,



Wm. Weston J. Newton
Chair, House Legislative Oversight Committee

cc:

- The Honorable Henry D. McMaster
- The Honorable Jay Lucas
- The Honorable Harvey S. Peeler, Jr.
- The Honorable G. Murrell Smith, Jr.
- The Honorable Leon Howard
- Ad Hoc Committee Members
- Mr. Mark R. Elam, Chairman, S.C. Board of Health and Environmental Control
- Mr. Allan Stalvey, S.C. Hospital Association
- Ms. Richele Taylor, S.C. Medical Association
- Ms. Rebecca Leach, S.C. Retail Association
- Mr. Craig Burrridge, S.C. Pharmacy Association