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January 14, 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster
State House
1100 Gervais Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor McMaster:

We applaud the work occurring to ensure that everyone in the state may be vaccinated from COVID-19. Our physicians are standing by willing and able to give COVID-19 vaccines to citizens. Unfortunately, most independent physicians, those not affiliated (directly employed) with a hospital, do not have a path to provide the COVID-19 vaccine to patients nor a path to volunteer.

Independent physicians across our state have signed up their offices through the Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS) to become COVID-19 vaccine sites, but thus far few have been activated by SC DHEC. One problem is truly the limited number of vaccines available; but the real concern is that only hospitals were activated prior to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine in our state. Activating sites quickly and creating paths to distribute the vaccine *outside of hospitals* is crucial. Citizens should not be tying up the already over-worked and inundated hospital personnel to receive the vaccine when there are available local clinics and physician offices. As more vaccine is available, our independent physicians are open and able to vaccinate patients every day.

Additionally, independent physicians and retired physicians have asked how to volunteer to give the COVID-19 vaccine, but there is no mechanism for them to sign up. Many would do so on weekends or after hours as they understand the importance of vaccinating as many people as possible. Neither SC DHEC nor hospitals have asked to bring in volunteer physicians or retired physicians.

In the end, the solution always turns to asking for expansion of scope for others in the medical care field with the promise that these changes will fill the gaps that exist; that cheaper care can be provided; or that there is no needed expertise in a medical degree. Once again physicians hear such testimony at the Statehouse and watch draft bills circulate arguing that our state needs to expand what mid-level medical professionals can do to vaccinate the public. But we must also take advantage of the physicians that are willing and able to help. Why not simply allow our physicians, who have authority and the knowledge to head their medical teams in giving vaccines, do so? The wheel does not need to be reinvented; it needs to be used.

Much of the discussion downtown this week has implied that physicians do not want to be vaccinated and did not sign up. This is simply not true. Independent physicians were not allowed to sign up to receive the vaccine until January 4th, and it was not until January 8th that most hospitals provided a path for them to sign up. Independent physicians serve as general practitioners, family physicians, pediatricians, internal medicine, and many other specialties where they do not always have hospital ties. These physicians have been seeing and treating patients with COVID-19, as the overwhelming majority of patients with COVID-19 are not admitted to hospitals.

Physicians want to assist in eradicating COVID-19, believe in the science behind the vaccine, and are spending time assuring the public of the value in getting vaccinated. Our states' independent physicians stand ready to serve and provide the vaccine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael T. Finch, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Michael T. Finch, Jr., MD
President

cc: The Honorable Harvey S. Peeler, Jr.
The Honorable James H. Lucas
W. Marshall Taylor, Acting Director, SC DHEC
Mr. Thorton Kirby, South Carolina Hospital Association