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January 20, 2021

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

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I am extremely concerned about the way that COVID-19 vaccine distribution is being executed across New York State. I understand that the supply and predictability of vaccine doses our state is receiving from the federal government is far from sufficient. There is also an ongoing need for more vaccination locations. However, independent of these issues, it is the system for vaccine-eligible individuals to attempt to sign up for vaccine appointments – a system that is piecemeal, inequitable, and deeply frustrating – that may be the most harmful to our long-term vaccination efforts.

As you have rightly pointed out, these challenging times require a level of government action comparable to FDR's New Deal. Yet the failures of the vaccine rollout contribute to a growing erosion of people's faith in government. People may give up entirely on trying to get vaccinated, and may be difficult to re-engage once the vaccine is more widely available. The system needs to be fixed quickly, and at the state level. Respectfully, the buck stops with you.

I hear from my constituents daily about the hurdles they are encountering in their efforts to get vaccinated. I know from discussions with my colleagues at the city and state level that these difficulties are widespread. These include:

- Numerous reports from constituents who have tried calling the city and state vaccine hotlines and either cannot get through to someone, or who wait on hold for lengthy periods of time before being able to speak with a representative, only to find out that there are no appointments.
- Lack of training for intake personnel on the telephone hotlines, and lack of coordination between the city and state hotlines.
- Difficulty navigating the state website and using the check-eligibility online tool, especially for those over 65 and/or without access to a computer.
- Concerns about being asked repeatedly to enter personal information including health insurance details before seeing appointment availability.
- Moving back and forth between the state, city, hospital, and pharmacy reservation websites is cumbersome, confusing, and time consuming. People have to repeatedly enter their information to look up vaccine availability at different sites, and are spending hours trying to access information about

appointment availability. I have heard from many younger family members that if they did not provide assistance, the older adults in their family would never get an appointment.

- New York City hospitals and city-run vaccine sites were forced to cancel thousands of first dose appointments for adults 65+ this past weekend due to last minute supply fluctuations and reappropriations.

The bottom line is that New Yorkers need a single, easy to navigate, centralized system, available online and over the phone, where they can make a local vaccine appointment or add their name to a waiting list to be notified when future appointments become available. In addition, a functional system must include the following:

- Allow for equitable access for older New Yorkers and those without internet access by providing a telephone appointment hotline with sufficient well-trained staff to minimize wait times.
- The website must have a logical, clear, and uncluttered layout with a user-friendly design, such as those available from several of the private hospital systems.
- Allow for the option to search for available appointments by date, or by seeing the next available appointment.
- It should only be necessary to fill out an eligibility questionnaire once, so that individuals can return to check appointment availability without having to fill it out repeatedly.
- State-, city-, and privately-run vaccination sites must all be included in one place, with clear and up-to-date information on the availability of appointments now and in the future.
- Include the ability to pre-register and receive a notification when appointments are available and/or have an appointment automatically scheduled, followed by email, phone, and/or text notification.
- Create a system to put website visitors in a holding queue when volume becomes too high.

I understand that creating such a statewide system is a large undertaking, however such a system is already in place in Indiana and Mississippi, and is being developed in Florida and Vermont. If we are truly at “war” with COVID-19, vaccination is our only hope for victory. New York State is losing this battle, and we must act rapidly and at scale to turn the tide.

Sincerely,



Liz Krueger  
State Senator