



TO: Members of the House Health Committee

FROM: Lisa Schaefer, Executive Director

DATE: February 2, 2021

RE: CCAP Comments on COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution in Pennsylvania

On behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, representing all 67 counties in the commonwealth, thank you for this opportunity to submit our comments on COVID-19 vaccine distribution in Pennsylvania.

Our local county officials continue to provide steadfast front-line response to the COVID-19 outbreak and have been doing so since the virus hit Pennsylvania back in March of 2020. Throughout the declaration of disaster emergency, counties across the commonwealth have been unwavering leaders in public health response and assuring that critical services continue to be provided to their communities in a time of great uncertainty and need.

For instance, caseworkers are continuing to investigate child abuse. We continue to see increased need for mental health and substance abuse services. Several counties still own their own nursing homes and are working to protect their residents and their employees. Counties are working to maintain the health and safety of our jails. Counties have taken on the role of providing information to the public on vaccination availability and even developed mass vaccination sites. Counties are working daily in their communities to help those they serve battle this virus. On behalf of CCAP, I want to take a moment to share our gratitude for our members – the county officials and the county staff all across this commonwealth – who are delivering vital services and serving on the front lines of the nation’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Above all, our counties continue to be committed to developing solutions, working together with their local health providers, emergency responders, business community and residents to figure out how we to move forward in the face of these challenges. With that in mind, we must stress the need to include county leaders in any and all decision-making that will impact their service provision and recovery efforts, including vaccination initiatives.

Vaccine distribution will necessarily look different across Pennsylvania’s 67 counties due to availability of staff, vaccine and resources, yet they all share the common goal of keeping our residents healthy and safe. With only six counties operating county health departments, counties rely on a close relationship with the Department of Health to act on behalf of our residents for public health matters. But all of our counties have their own emergency management agencies,

which also play a critical role in emergency planning and response, and in fact have had experience in coordinating pandemic response, most recently the H1N1 outbreak in the late 2000s, that can be leveraged in our current COVID-19 response.

Since counties know where and how to reach our residents in the most effective way, partnership with the administration can reduce the stress on the Department in their statewide efforts. In fact, counties have been working on the ground with members of their communities and coordinating with local health systems to meet our mutual goal of ensuring all of those who are eligible and want to receive the COVID-19 vaccine can. One ask consistent across all counties is that we seek to be a partner in developing the solutions and planning, so that as vaccines become available, distribution can be as efficient as possible.

Counties continue to stand ready to be strong partners with the state in providing important services to the residents and communities of Pennsylvania, and we want these efforts to be successful. We have an opportunity to take action that can be collaborative and positive, and we thank the Department of Health and PEMA for their efforts to keep us up-to-date on vaccination plans and efforts while listening to our concerns. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the state to ensure the health, safety and vitality of those we serve, and so that we may ultimately save lives and continue past this most difficult chapter.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to assure that the county voice is heard on this important topic.