

# **CALL TO ACTION:**

## **Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition**

### **Announces 5 Demands for Vaccine Equity**

On February 17<sup>th</sup> the newly formed Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition announced its roadmap for more equitable distribution of vaccines to the disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities of Massachusetts. Following the announcement of a \$1M fund for the 20 most affected communities across Massachusetts, the Coalition has responded with gratitude for what amounts to a “good start,” in the words of Eva Millona, of MIRA.

Dr. Atyia Martin of the Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition cited the avoidable but ongoing inequities experienced by the state’s minority populations. She highlighted the statistical disparities and how tired she and her constituent communities are, of seeing the avalanche of issues and solutions that are continually by-passing largely ignored populations. These actions urged today work to everyone in the Commonwealth’s benefit.

Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association outlined the predictable, indeed predicted and unheeded, disparities rooted in structural racism which has led to incredible disparities in the diagnosis and hospitalization rates of Black and Brown populations compared to the white population in Massachusetts. Ms. Pavlos stressed that the 20% additional allocation which the Coalition calls for, and which the Baker-Polito Administration is agreeing with, must be delivered now, and must not be subordinate to issues of general vaccine supply.

Helena Dasilva-Hughes, Director of the Immigrants’ Assistance Center highlighted the often discounted rates of disparity suffered by people who are distant from Metropolitan Boston. The continued failure to utilize established ethnic and community based centers in places on the Southcoast Region was highlighted as an example of how the vaccines are not reaching the key immigrant communities. Brought the “underground economy” issues to light, and how many people need to be reached out to, to bring services to them that they would otherwise not receive, and how the system inherently lacks that outreach capacity.

Ivan Espinoza-Madrigal, Executive Director of the Lawyers for Civil Rights discussed the lack of access people have suffered as they try to make appointments, access the vaccination centers and navigate the course which is not taking into account the various disparities faced in accessing the vaccine rollout. He pointed out that the same vaccine inadequacies that were blamed on the Trump administration are no better today under the Biden Administration, all pointing to the fact that it is not the Federal Government, but the Baker-Polito Administration that continues to underperform and adversely affect the rights of so many minority sector citizens. Espinoza-Madrigal highlighted how essential workers are receiving mention but not being given access to the vaccine or other essential services particularly in the Hispanic and Black populations, specifically citing bodega workers who come in contact with countless potential exposures, yet are invisible in the vaccination plans.

Rep. Liz Miranda thanked those who have pushed the Executive Branch to deliver the services that have been delivered so far. Rep. Miranda highlighted the mistrust caused by environmental and medical racism that are structural in today's vaccination programs. The Governor must recognize the barriers put up, and must act on removing those barriers. Her community is 94% minority and most have never been to Gillette, and can't get there, and have likewise not ever seen Fenway Park. She stated, "We can do this, but it has to be done now!"

Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz emphasized how uncomplicated and straight forward the fix is for the issues. Chang-Diaz stated that it comes down to the list of 5 actions laid out by this Coalition. These specific steps would constitute a fully built out plan with true accountability. The measurements and remediation steps are all within easy reach if they are looked at and acted upon from the top down, and not placed on the back of a minimum-wage-earning mom who is balancing her kids' educations against the ability to pay the rent and put food on her table. Chang-Diaz stressed that we need to get vaccines to people and people to vaccines, and how to do it needs to be determined by someone who is dedicated to this issue full-time while not balancing other issues confronting other facets of public health, highlighting the need for a Vaccine Czar, who she said would need to be a solid grass-roots organizer who is surrounded by a cadre of well-informed and experienced emergency managers.

**The member groups of the Coalition are:**

*ACLU Massachusetts | Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition | Immigrants Assistance Center | La Colaborativa | Lawyers for Civil Rights | King Boston | MA Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition | MA Public Health Association | NAACP, New England Area Conference | Southeast Asian Coalition of Central MA | Union of Minority Neighborhoods*

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**The five Demands of the Coalition are:**

**DEMAND 1: Direct \$10 million to trusted community organizations for outreach & engagement in communities of color**

Historical and contemporary experiences of racism and discrimination have led to higher levels of earned distrust in Black, Latinx, immigrant, and low-income communities, and among people who are incarcerated. Funds should be immediately dedicated to trusted community organizations in these communities to engage residents, provide accurate information, and address concerns. These organizations have trusting relationships and know how to reach and effectively engage residents.

**DEMAND 2: Immediately implement the promised 20% additional doses for the most impacted communities**

The Baker Administration has promised this enhanced vaccine allocation for communities most impacted by COVID-19 - but has failed to deliver. This must be implemented immediately and should be defined by the zip code of residents receiving the vaccine, not the location of the clinic. These additional allocations must be available in all regions of the state and should be distributed through partnerships with community organizations and mobile vaccination programs, among other

methods.

**DEMAND 3: Set clear goals & track vaccine benchmarks that mirror the disproportionate impact on Black & Latinx residents**

Black and Latinx residents have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, yet are receiving vaccines at far lower rates than White residents. In order to change this, the Baker Administration must establish and monitor clear goals to provide vaccines that mirror the proportion of hospitalizations experienced by each racial group - meaning at least 10% and 15% of doses for Black and Latinx residents, respectively - larger than their share of the population. To date, the vaccine rates of Latinx and Black residents have been alarmingly low, at only 3.9% and 5.1%, respectively. For transparency, de-identified raw data must be available for public analysis, with strong privacy protections in place.

**DEMAND 4: Improve language access & cultural competence across all aspects of vaccine outreach & administration**

All aspects of the vaccine distribution - including the website, call center, print materials, staff at vaccine sites, and media campaigns - must be inclusive of residents who speak Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, Vietnamese, Khmer, and Mandarin, among other languages. Health care professionals and residents of color, as well as those from diverse language backgrounds, should be engaged in the production of the state's mass media campaign.

**DEMAND 5: Appoint a vaccine czar with authority & accountability to address vaccine inequities**

Governor Baker should immediately appoint a senior-level director of COVID-19 vaccination equity and outreach whose sole focus will be eliminating inequities in COVID-19 vaccination rates rooted in racism and discrimination, distrust of government, and differential access to information, transportation, and other resources.

The link to the "sign-on" letter is:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfxHq69D\\_Z2uTzZINgpHtoqpoHWd-grjg3P\\_GnsyqZPonAQwA/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfxHq69D_Z2uTzZINgpHtoqpoHWd-grjg3P_GnsyqZPonAQwA/viewform)