



Deborah Kafoury

Multnomah County Chair

December 22, 2020

The Honorable Governor Kate Brown
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Dear Governor Brown,

Since the arrival and initial distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in our state last week, Multnomah County has been cautiously optimistic that this scientific achievement signaled the arrival of a tool that would eventually help end the devastating spread and disruption of the virus. We know that fully vaccinating our community will likely take several months as we face delays and uncertainties in vaccine supply. With such a limited supply of doses nationally, we welcomed a thoughtful prioritization by the state in order to distribute vaccines first to those people most likely to get severely ill or die from the virus, and progressing to those more able to protect themselves.

In particular, we were heartened by a state process you have described as being centered in an “equitable system challenging the roles of power, privilege and racism.” So we are frankly alarmed and dismayed that the actual allocation prioritization as described omits people in our communities who have experienced the most disproportionate rates of infection and death and who deal with long-standing inequities in health care and health access. Among the most egregious examples: a prioritization that brings law enforcement to the forefront, but not those in law enforcement custody whose infection rates nationally are up to four times the general population.

The epidemiological data is clear that prisons and detention facilities are high-risk settings that justify the same level of concern and counter measures that are being required in other high-risk congregate care settings. The inescapable close contact among people in prisons, the minimal reduction in census since COVID-19 and the percentage of people with underlying health conditions make them among the most vulnerable. Other states recognize this and are placing both staff and incarcerated populations high on their priority lists.

By any moral, ethical, epidemiological and legal perspective, if you vaccinate staff, you must also vaccinate the incarcerated population in their care. In addition to reducing risk, it also would reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 spreading into our County detention and court facilities as people move through the public safety system, and into our transitional housing, homeless shelters and neighborhoods as they are released.

We recognize the Herculean task of equitably distributing such a precious limited resource. We ask you to include all those who cannot escape potential outbreaks in your prioritization, from long-term care, to shelters, to corrections facilities. Such a move not only embraces science, but the state's unique responsibility in a pandemic and our shared humanity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Kafoury", with a stylized, cursive script.

Deborah Kafoury
Multnomah County Chair