



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

April 23, 2021

Heather Iliff
President & CEO
Maryland Nonprofits
1500 Union Ave, #2500
Baltimore, MD 21211

Gabriela Lemus
Executive Director
Maryland Latinos Unidos
1500 Union Ave, #2500
Baltimore, MD 21211

Dear Ms. Iliff and Ms. Lemus:

Thank you for contacting Governor Larry Hogan on March 16, 2021, regarding the role that nonprofit and faith based communities can play in addressing vaccine equity and access challenges. As Acting Deputy Secretary of the Public Health Services at the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), I am pleased to respond.

MDH fully understands the disparate impact that COVID-19 has had on communities of color in Maryland. We are also keenly aware of the historical level of distrust that has existed between people of color and representatives of the scientific and government sectors in the name of medical testing in the past. That is why, on January 29, the State of Maryland launched its [GoVAX](#) grassroots public outreach and equity campaign to build public trust and promote vaccine confidence. The GoVAX campaign encourages all Marylanders—especially those among historically underserved populations that have been disproportionately affected by the disease—to protect themselves, their families, and their communities by getting vaccinated when they become eligible.

As part of this effort, the Governor announced the creation of the Maryland Vaccine Equity Task Force (VETF), which is led by Brigadier General Janeen Birckhead of the Maryland National Guard and includes the state's leading minority health and health disparity experts. The task force employs a data-driven approach to make the equitable distribution of the vaccine a reality. I have enclosed a copy of the Vaccine Equity Task Force Plan from March 4; it can also be found [online](#). Both the plan and the state's actions address each of the specific concerns listed in Maryland Nonprofits' letter from March 16, including internet access, transportation and disability access, outreach by trusted messengers, vaccine site placement, language access, vaccine hesitancy, and more.

Maryland and the VETF are actively working with providers, faith-based organizations, and businesses across the state to increase Marylanders' access to the COVID-19 vaccine, especially among our most vulnerable populations. One of many examples of these efforts can be seen in the VETF's partnership with the First Baptist Church in Glenarden and University of Maryland Capital Region Health to establish a large, community-focused vaccination site in Prince George's County. This site was made possible thanks to the leadership of Pastor John K. Jenkins, a trusted voice in the Prince George's County community, who offered the church's 63,000 square foot family life center to dramatically expand the hospital's vaccination clinic. A number of similar and smaller-scale efforts are already occurring at other sites in Prince George's County as well as in Baltimore City and Montgomery County.

The state is continually assessing its options for additional vaccine sites, including churches and community centers. We encourage any church or non-profit business that is interested in hosting a community-sponsored vaccine event to fill out the "Community Request" proposal form found in the enclosed Vaccine Equity Task Force Plan, Appendix 1.

On March 18, Governor Hogan announced The Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission established a Community Vaccination Grant Program to support hospital efforts to engage in community-based vaccination efforts. Through this unique grant program, hospitals will work with trusted community partners—non-profits and faith-based organizations—to increase Marylanders' access to the COVID-19 vaccine especially in vulnerable, underserved, and hard-to-reach areas.

We particularly appreciate your concerns about residents without internet access and their ability to navigate the appointment process. On February 16, the state launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Support Center, which is available at **1-855-MDGOVAX** (1-855-634-6829), seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. The Vaccination Support Center is prepared to offer any Marylander assistance registering for an appointment at a mass vaccination site or locating additional vaccination options in their community.

The COVID-19 Vaccination Support Center successfully answered 1,300 calls in Spanish on its first full day of operation alone. We encourage Spanish-speaking Marylanders who have vaccine-related questions or need help scheduling a vaccination appointment to call the support center at the number listed above. More information on the support center can be found online by clicking [here](#). This document and additional vaccine information are available in several different languages and can be found at covidlink.maryland.gov.

Thank you for your continued understanding as we make progress toward ensuring the health and safety of every Marylander.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jinlene Chan MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Jinlene Chan, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.A.P.
Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services (Act.)

Enclosed: [Maryland Vaccine Equity Task Force Report](#)