

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 16, 2021

Norris Cochran
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Acting Secretary Cochran:

This week, President Biden announced the launch of the Federally Qualified Health Center program to provide additional COVID-19 vaccines to select Community Health Centers (CHCs) nationwide, in a commendable effort to address the unconscionable racial and ethnic health disparities that have been compounded by the pandemic. It is our understanding that the program will be phased in over the next few weeks to ensure that CHCs in all 50 states will ultimately be able to receive additional, needed vaccines to help the vulnerable communities that they serve. However, we were disappointed to learn that Illinois CHCs will be left out of the first round of this program, slated to begin next week with 25 CHCs nationwide receiving vaccines.

As the sixth most populous state in the nation, and the state with the fifth most confirmed cases of COVID-19, we were surprised and disappointed to learn that the Administration would not be providing additional vaccines to Illinois CHCs in the first allotment of this program. We understand that the program is intended to supply additional vaccines to CHCs that serve significantly high numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness; public housing residents; migrant and seasonal agricultural workers; and patients with limited English proficiency. As you are no doubt aware, CHCs across Illinois serve these populations on a daily basis—and at among the highest rates in the country—and are in dire need of additional vaccine doses in order to safeguard the health of these vulnerable individuals. And while we appreciate the 28 percent increase in Illinois' vaccine allocation over the past three weeks under this Administration's leadership, additional federal resources are desperately needed.

Given the failures of the Trump Administration to devise and implement a strong federal response to this pandemic, we are encouraged by the steps your Department has taken so far to address this ongoing public health threat. But more federal assistance is needed to help hard-hit states, like ours. Over the next week, your Department will make the critical decision of determining which additional CHCs nationwide will receive COVID-19 vaccines through this program. As we have communicated directly to the White House, we hope and expect that several Illinois CHCs will be included in the next round of vaccine allotments through this program to meet the acute needs in Illinois.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of this matter and we look forward to working with you to quickly scale up efforts to get vaccines into the arms of those in need, especially underserved and vulnerable communities served by our nation's CHCs.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator