

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

February 8, 2021

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

Dr. Rochelle Walensky  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Mailstop F-80  
4770 Buford Highway, NE  
Atlanta, GA, 30341

Dear Acting Secretary Cochran and Director Walensky:

Thank you for your work thus far to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in Virginia and nationally. As the Biden administration continues to ramp up efforts to get more Americans vaccinated, we are writing to request that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) work closely with states and local governments to ensure the equitable distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccine doses in rural and medically underserved communities. Specifically, we ask that you take the necessary steps of ensuring the newly launched Federal Retail Pharmacy Program has a sufficient number of participating pharmacy partners in rural Southwest Virginia communities.

We have heard from a number of providers, community leaders, and other stakeholders expressing their concerns about a lack of adequate vaccine access in rural areas of Virginia. We understand that current vaccine doses are limited in every community and do believe that you are working in good faith to best distribute and administer a limited number of vaccine supplies. However, we are particularly concerned with recent reports that there are zero Southwest Virginia pharmacies participating in the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program.

As you know, Americans in rural and underserved communities are more likely to be older or otherwise at-risk for developing severe infection from COVID-19. This reality makes it all the more important to appropriately expedite available vaccine doses to these communities. We appreciate that by launching the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program, HHS and CDC have taken deliberate steps to implement a national vaccination strategy, but we must make sure this national strategy appropriately includes rural communities.

We urge you to work with stakeholders in Virginia to expand the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program to include providers in Southwest Virginia. Additionally, we ask that you further

examine the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program and your national vaccination strategy to ensure that it includes a plan for equitable vaccine distribution and administration in rural communities. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request, and we look forward to hearing back from you. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or need additional information from us or our staff.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator