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MEDIA CONTACT:

[Karissa Hand](#), 508-406-8186

As Baker Touts MA's Vaccine Progress, Racial Disparities in Distribution Persist

BOSTON – The Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition responded today to Governor Charlie Baker's joint event with President Joe Biden highlighting Massachusetts' progress on vaccination. The Coalition pointed out that although Massachusetts has made rapid progress on overall rates of vaccination, persistent racial disparities in vaccination remain and illustrate the lack of equity in the rollout process to date. The [most recent data](#) shows that while 55 percent of white residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine, only 33 percent of Latinx residents, 37 percent of Black residents, and 53 percent of Asian residents have received at least one dose. This is despite the fact that communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID hospitalization.

The coalition of more than 30 racial justice, immigrant justice, public health and civil rights organizations is doubling down on their calls for the Governor to meet with them, emphasizing that closing these racial disparities is essential if Massachusetts truly wants to claim to have a nation-leading vaccine program. Instead, equity has consistently been an afterthought for the Baker administration, as the Governor continues to use hesitancy as a scapegoat for inequities, rather than working in coordination with community organizations and unions to lower the barriers that exist for BIPOC and immigrant communities and workers.

“While Governor Baker is touting Massachusetts’ progress on vaccine distribution, racial disparities have persisted since the beginning of the vaccine program and remain a major concern,” said **Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition Co-Chairs Dr. Atyia Martin of the Resilient 21 Coalition, Eva Millona of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, and Carlene Pavlos of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**. “For months, our coalition of Black, Latinx and immigrant leaders has requested a meeting with Governor Baker and answers to basic questions about vaccine equity, such as what

benchmarks the administration is using to measure its progress on closing these racial disparities. We have still not received so much as a response to our request to meet or any answers to our questions.”

The Co-Chairs pointed to Governor Baker’s remarks last week when announcing the shift away from mass vaccination sites towards regional and mobile sites as evidence that equity was not his priority from the start. “Now that we believe we are going to hit the 4.1 million goal we started with in the next few weeks, it’s time to adapt our vaccination effort to make sure we get to some of the harder-to-reach populations,” the Governor [said](#) at the time.

“If reaching the communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic and ensuring equitable access to the vaccine was truly a top priority for the Baker administration, it would have invested in these community-based sites proven to reduce inequities from the outset of the program,” said **Martin, Millona and Pavlos**.

The coalition is also elevating the challenges faced by community organizations and labor unions on the ground trying to get their communities and members vaccinated, which stand in stark contrast to the rosy picture painted by Governor Baker.

“Unions submitted proposals to Governor Baker to get essential workers vaccinated on site. Among the unions that submitted on-site proposals were United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1445 (UFCW 1445), the Transportation Unions, and the Massachusetts Teachers Association,” said **Gabriel Camacho, Political Director for UFCW 1445**. “Our proposals were simple. Instead of having workers who take public transportation and may have more than one job with family obligations take a day off of work and go to one of the state’s mega vaccination sites, why not have the vaccinations go to where people work? These proposals were submitted with great detail to Governor Baker yet they were all rejected.”

“I have reached out to employers where our immigrants are working to make sure they are getting vaccinated at their worksites. Many of our clients work long hours and do not have the luxury of sick time in order to get the vaccine,” said **Helena DaSilva, Executive Director of the Immigrants’ Assistance Center in New Bedford**. “If we don’t go to them, they will not be able to access the vaccine. I worry about the rest of the state where immigrants do not have advocates that can advocate on their behalf so they can get vaccinated at their workplace or churches that they attend. We all know by now that our hardest hit immigrant population are

our Black and Brown communities who are frontline and essential workers who risk their lives everyday to make sure that we have food at our tables and that our elders and children are being taken care of. Please let's learn from the past and not forget them again!"

"While we are thankful that Governor Baker has increased the vaccine supply, we are still concerned about access for communities of color that have been hardest hit by the pandemic," said **Gina Plata-Nino of the Worcester Together Coalition**. "There has not been clear messaging or one centralized entity leading efforts towards vaccine equity at the state level. The administration needs to do more to combat misinformation and assuage the fears of Massachusetts residents. It is also concerning that the process to apply for state funding for vaccine outreach was so difficult that many grassroots organizations that had been working on vaccine equity were unable to apply. We need stronger leadership and more clear, culturally competent communication from the state about the importance of vaccination and how to access the vaccine."

"Vaccine equity has not happened in the state of Massachusetts yet. Yes, there are resources that are available to do outreach in the BIPOC community, and yet that still has not happened," said **Renee Ledbetter, Director of the New Bedford Shannon Initiative, Vice President of the NAACP New Bedford, and President of United Interfaith Action of Southeastern Massachusetts**. "There are still people dying from this terrible virus and we are waiting for funding? The lack of trust that our communities of color have in the government and the lack of confidence that they have in the healthcare system stem from all of the myths that have been put out there in the public that have yet to be dispelled. We have to act now and we have to act fast before we lose any more of our relatives, friends and community members."

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