

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 17, 2021

Contact:

Karissa Hand, MA Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition: 508-406-8186

Dr. Atyia Martin, Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition: 857-364-1264

Carlene Pavlos, MA Public Health Association: 857-544-9764

**Coalition Calls on Governor Baker to Take Five Immediate Actions to
Address Racial Inequities in COVID-19 Vaccinations**

Today, the newly-formed “Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition” issued a set of [five demands](#) to Governor Baker to address the serious racial inequities plaguing the state’s vaccine rollout. The coalition, comprised of 11 civil rights, immigrant justice, and public health organizations, raised the alarm as vaccination rates for White residents are far outpacing those for Black and Latinx residents that have been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“COVID-19 has exacerbated the already deep structural inequities in our country, resulting in a disproportionate impact on communities of color and immigrant communities. These disparities underscore why our vaccine rollout must be centered on those who have been most impacted by this crisis,” said **Eva Millona, President & CEO of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition**. “Our coalition has come together to urge our governor to act with the urgency and on the scale that this crisis demands to embrace a more equitable vaccine rollout plan – one that includes input from Black, brown, and immigrant leaders. We look forward to working with Governor Baker to turn these recommendations into reality.”

[State data](#) show that Black and Latinx residents have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. But now with vaccines finally available, White residents have received the vast majority of the state’s vaccine doses. As of last week, White residents had received 12 times more doses than Black residents and 16 times more doses than Latinx residents.

The coalition today called on the Governor to:

1. Direct \$10 million to trusted community organizations for outreach and engagement in communities of color.
2. Immediately implement the promised 20% additional doses for the most impacted communities.
3. Set clear goals and track vaccine benchmarks that mirror the disproportionate impact on Black and Latinx residents.
4. Improve language access and cultural competence across all aspects of vaccine outreach and administration.

5. Appoint a vaccine czar with authority and accountability to address vaccine inequities.

“The only way Massachusetts and the nation will defeat COVID is to ensure the communities that have been hardest hit have real access to vaccines,” said **Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association**. “Speed is indeed important here, but the Baker Administration’s focus on efficiency is coming at the expense of both fairness and sound science for how to stop the spread of infectious disease.”

“Here in New Bedford, it’s outrageous how many barriers there are for our immigrant community to get vaccinated,” said **Helena daSilva Hughes, Executive Director of the Immigrants Assistance Center**. “There are no local sites in our region and transportation is a challenge for many, a lot of our members don’t speak English or have computers, and there is a tremendous amount of distrust of government due to anti-immigrant policies. The thing that’s so frustrating about this is that none of this is a surprise. The Baker Administration has had months and months to prepare, but it feels like they’ve forgotten us. We have the solutions on the ground if we’d just be given the tools.”

“Mistreatment, abuse, and generations of unequal access to medical treatment have led to high levels of medical distrust among people of color,” said **Iván Espinoza-Madrigo, Executive Director of Lawyers for Civil Rights**. “By providing the needed resources to trusted community-based organizations, the Baker Administration can build bridges into communities of color and immigrant communities and provide accurate and truthful information. Modest efforts have been made in this direction to date, but this work must be swiftly accelerated and implemented on a much larger scale in order for the state’s vaccination program to be successful.”

“In communities of color, mistrust of health institutions and vaccination is a problem, but this cannot be used as a scapegoat,” said **State Representative Liz Miranda of Dorchester and a sponsor of vaccine equity legislation**. “Vaccination rates are showing blatant racial disparities caused by current access barriers, decades of medical racism, and inequity in our health systems. Who has been prioritized versus who’s been left behind is a blatant example of why the COVID-19 pandemic hit our communities the hardest. The vaccine equity bill provides a roadmap to empower the grassroots and meet people where they’re at.”

“If we didn't know already, the rollout has made it clear: equity won't happen by accident,” said **State Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz (D-Boston), a sponsor of vaccine equity legislation**. “The good news is, we have the tools and means to invest in sustained, multi-faceted outreach towards the hardest-hit communities, create more accessible vaccination sites, and increase transparency and oversight regarding the status of the rollout. The Governor can act today to make this happen, and if he won’t, the Legislature must.”

###

About Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition

The coalition is comprised of the following organizations: ACLU Massachusetts, Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition, Immigrants Assistance Center, King Boston, La Colaborativa, Lawyers for Civil Rights, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, Massachusetts Public Health Association, NAACP, New England Area Conference, Southeast Asian Coalition of Central MA, and Union of Minority Neighborhoods.

The launch event was co-chaired by Eva Millona of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, Dr. Atyia Martin of the Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition, and Carlene Pavlos of the Massachusetts Public Health Association.