

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 12, 2021

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

Dear Acting Secretary Cochran:

We appreciate your leadership throughout this unprecedented crisis and look forward to continuing our work with you on the urgent need to increase COVID-19 vaccinations across the country. As the vaccination rollout continues, we have been concerned that certain traditionally underserved communities are at an increased risk of being left behind. We commend the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and the Biden Administration for taking immediate action to increase the pool of eligible health care providers who can administer these lifesaving vaccinations – including these previously untapped health professionals, such as doctors of optometry, who are fully trained, willing, and ready to help in the more than 10,000 communities where they are already providing care, especially in rural and urban underserved areas that now need them most.

As the National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness outlined, efforts to expand the range of qualified health care professionals recognized to administer COVID-19 vaccinations was much-needed. While a number of states have taken steps that allow doctors of optometry to administer these vaccines, the recently issued declaration by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act for Medical Countermeasures Against COVID-19, now allowing optometrists, along with dentists, EMTs, midwives, paramedics, physician assistants, podiatrists, respiratory therapists and veterinarians to begin administering vaccines nationwide, will provide critical support necessary to address this public health emergency.

Providing this authority provides a range of communities with quick, safe, and easy access to these vital vaccinations. Doctors of optometry, and a range of other trained healthcare professionals, are fully trained to provide injections and are well situated geographically to be able to reach individuals in rural counties and urban areas with underserved populations including our most vulnerable – seniors and those on public safety net programs.

We strongly believe that this declaration by HHS under the PREP Act will allow medical professionals across the country to join their colleagues already on the frontlines in a growing number of states that have already granted expanded vaccination authority.

This is a time for America to leverage all the fully trained, ready, and willing personnel at our disposal to combat this public health emergency. This declaration will better bolster the vaccination workforce under the PREP Act and we thank you for taking this critical step in the battle against COVID-19. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Christopher Cox at Christopher.Cox@mail.house.gov.

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Sincerely,



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

/s/
Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

/s/
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/
Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/
Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

/s/
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

/s/
Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/
Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

/s/
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

/s/
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

/s/
Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/
Sheila Jackson-Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/
Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

/s/
Scott Peters
Member of Congress

/s/
Katie Porter
Member of Congress

/s/
Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress

/s/
Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515