

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 12, 2021

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky  
Acting Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
395 E Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Dr. Walensky:

We are writing to express our support for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), as well as the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who provide frontline services and supports, to be included in the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendation for Phase 1b and Phase 1c vaccination groups due to the high COVID-19 mortality rates among this population. We fear that by not including these individuals with I/DD, as well as their direct support staff, in Phase 1b/c prioritization, the populations may face increased risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19.

Early analysis from Syracuse University revealed COVID-19 related death rates in individuals with I/DD residing in New York were 2.4 times higher than the general state population. Structural factors, such as limited healthcare access and the tendency to live in co-residencies, greatly contribute to the general poor health experiences of these individuals and the conditions are exacerbated during public health crises such as COVID-19. However, this heightened risk for severe complication or death is not limited to just individuals in congregate settings. Individuals with I/DD living in settings other than co-residencies face the same increased risks and because of this, they have been forced, in many cases, to stop receiving their normal services and supports which can cause greater exposure. We believe that by ensuring states receive the recommendation to include all individuals with I/DD in Phase 1c, and not just individuals in congregate settings, they will better be able to address the enhanced risks these individuals face. This recommendation should explicitly apply to all persons with I/DD, those living in group homes and other living arrangements.

Direct support professionals for individuals with I/DD are often group home workers and staff or provide services in individual homes or community settings. Despite caring for high-risk individuals and thereby frequently exposing such populations to COVID-19, these support staff are not recommended by ACIP to be in Phase 1b vaccinations with other health care personnel. DSPs should be recognized as the essential health professionals they are and included in Phase 1b to ensure the individuals they support who are at heightened risk are not further exposed to COVID-19.

In light of the heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19 among individuals with I/DD and the important role that DSPs play in the health and well-being of people with disabilities whom they support, we urge the CDC to recommend all states include individuals with I/DD regardless of their particular setting and direct support professionals in Phase 1c and Phase 1b, respectively. This important step will help to responsibly and effectively reduce the mortality among the I/DD population and correctly identifies this, an underserved population as a priority.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



John Katko  
Member of Congress



Kathleen M. Rice  
Member of Congress

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Letter: List of Signatories

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