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The Arc of Pennsylvania is affiliated with The Arc of the United States and 33 local chapters of The Arc across PA.

RE: Comments for Hearing on Pennsylvania COVID-19 Vaccination Plan

The Arc of Pennsylvania
Senate Health & Human Services Committee
February 4, 2021

The Arc of Pennsylvania submits the following comments regarding the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Pennsylvania and our concerns for the intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) community.

The Arc of Pennsylvania, which is a member of The Arc US, is the state's leading advocacy organization for the human rights of Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disability (I/DD). For the past 70 years, The Arc of Pennsylvania, our local chapters, and 8,000+ members, have worked to ensure that children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities receive the support and services they need, are included in their community, and have control over their own lives.

The emergence of COVID-19 has created a crisis in the disability community. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are more susceptible to the virus due to underlying medical conditions, due to social distancing and health concerns, are faced with fewer direct support professionals to provide services. Vaccines would go along way in alleviating these issues, but barriers remain for people with IDD accessing vaccines. We understand the fluidity of the situation and the reliance on the federal government to provide the state with the vaccines; however, The Arc of Pennsylvania is concerned with the COVID-19 vaccination plan, specifically by the lack of consistent communication on its implementation, digital barriers for many in accessing the vaccine, and accessible vaccination location sites.

1. **Lack of Consistency Among Counties:** We are grateful to the Department of Health's (DOH) plan to include individuals with disabilities and their caregivers under Phase 1A. Counties are denying eligibility to some individuals with I/DD and their caregivers stating they are not eligible under the Phase 1A category.
 - a. The Arc of Pennsylvania requests DOH communicate to the counties the correct protocol in implementing the COVID-19 vaccine to individuals with I/DD and their caregivers.
 - b. A concise summary of the COVID-19 vaccination plan is imperative as it will enable individuals and families to understand where they fall under the plan.
 - c. Many people need information in alternative formats in order to effectively process it; DOH needs to create materials that are accessible to all people and at all comprehension levels.
2. **Reliance on the Internet and Digital Communications to Procure a Vaccine:** Throughout the course of the pandemic, the use of broadband/internet access has become essential to live and work. For people with limited income or limited access to



internet/phone, accessing information on how and where to get the COVID-19 vaccine is difficult. If an individual does not have phone or internet access, there is no current guidance from the department on how they can get vaccinated.

- a. The Arc of Pennsylvania recommends DOH and the Department of Human Services (DHS) support individuals with I/DD and their caregivers who may not have access to reliable internet or phone communications.
 - b. The Departments must provide information for individuals with limited phone/internet access.
 - c. Education in accessible formats for individuals at all comprehension levels is imperative to attain informed consent.
3. **Physical and Information Accessibility:** Ensuring vaccine locations are both physically and informationally accessible to individuals with I/DD and their families is imperative. The Arc of Pennsylvania recommends DOH consider the following:
- a. The Arc of Pennsylvania urges the department to choose a variety of locations that account not only for physical accessibility needs, but also access close to public transportation. In addition, sites must be accommodating for individuals who may have sensory issues or unable to wear a face covering.
 - b. The vaccine locator map on DOH website is difficult to navigate, especially for individuals who are visually impaired or have low vision, and in fact, for all Pennsylvanians. The Arc of Pennsylvania encourages the department to adjust the system to make it easier to access and navigate for all individuals across the Commonwealth.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on Pennsylvania's COVID-19 vaccination plan and its impact on individuals with I/DD and their caregivers.

Sincerely,



Sherri Landis
Executive Director
The Arc of Pennsylvania