



ANGELO SANTABARBARA
 Assemblyman 111th District

THE ASSEMBLY
 STATE OF NEW YORK
 ALBANY

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 Autism Spectrum Disorders
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 Veterans' Affairs

March 2nd, 2021

Howard A. Zucker, Commissioner
 New York State Department of Health
 Corning Tower
 Empire State Plaza,
 Albany, NY 12237

Dear Dr. Zucker,

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a tremendous toll on our state and its residents over the past year, but we're finally getting a handle on the pandemic through mask wearing, social distancing and a ramped-up vaccine distribution. As we anticipate a more stable vaccine supply line, we must get ahead of challenges that could stop us from reaching critical herd immunity levels. While mass vaccination sites have recently been established in upstate cities, many New Yorkers who live in rural regions of the state simply do not have the time or means to travel to these new sites. Metropolitan areas may be able to serve a greater proportion of the population, but we cannot simply leave our rural communities behind.

Therefore, I am urging the New York State Department of Health develop guidelines allowing our New York State ambulance services to administer COVID-19 vaccines. Along with this, the state must look into whether we need to supply additional funding to rural ambulance services so we can prepare for this challenge to mass vaccination. As a representative of many rural communities, I know firsthand the challenges that are faced by families in these communities. Traveling to vaccination sites is an issue in my district, and I know that neighbors, friends and relatives make the drive to obtain essentials for those that are unable to make it themselves, such as travel-restricted seniors or people with disabilities. That is why this is such a pressing issue. Without ensuring we have methods in place to reach all New Yorkers who want access to the vaccine, we are undermining our own efforts to get this virus under control.

Medicare and Medicaid have issued guidelines on reimbursement rates for ambulances that perform vaccine administration. However, becoming a vaccine administrator can be a complicated process, and ambulance services in rural areas already struggle with limited staff and resources. Therefore, it's critical that we move forward on this issue to help ensure that rural communities get equitable vaccine access. Other states have already moved forward with plans to add ambulance services into their vaccination strategies and it's time for New York to put a plan in motion as well. I urge you to consider this proposal to address the unique challenges of serving rural populations.

Sincerely,



Angelo Santabarbara

Member of the New York State Assembly
 111th District, Representing areas of Albany, Montgomery & Schenectady Counties