

January 11, 2021

Re: Qualifying Workers in Out-of-School Childcare and Educational Settings for Vaccine Eligibility within Phase 2

Dear Secretary Sudders and Members of the COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Group:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Camping Association (MCA), the Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs, Massachusetts Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs, Jewish Community Relations Council, and the undersigned organizations, we submit the following comments to the COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Group which is charged with advising the Governor and the Department of Public Health on the allocation and distribution of immunizing agents. We urge you to ensure that all categories of child-care workers in all out-of-school-time settings, including the 40,000 summer camp staff, are prioritized for early allocation of COVID-19 vaccines within Phase 2.

SUMMARY

The ongoing availability of healthy staff and continuous operation of these out-of-school time programs is critical to the economic recovery of our country. Workers operating in out-of-school settings such as organized camps, afterschool programs, childcare, community-based centers and recreation programs, provide essential services to early learners and students and to their working parents and caregivers. Most of these out-of-school programs also provide in-person early and K-12 learning supports and enrichment while others facilitate safe and supervised care for children who are participating in distance learning in partnership with families, local municipalities, and school departments. For these reasons, workers in out-of-school settings should be eligible to receive vaccinations coincident with other workers in the Education sector in Phase 2.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION AND EVIDENCE

Our workforce has enabled health care and frontline workers to attend to their essential duties with the confidence in knowing that their children, infants to teenagers, are being supervised, well taken care of, and benefitting from in-person education. These workers have carried out these duties despite the loss of substantial revenue due to COVID-19 impacts on the economy.

Just a few examples of childcare and community-support initiatives that are underway across the Commonwealth include:

Massachusetts Camp Association (MCA) (representing over 1400 day and overnight camps serving 250,000 children and youth)

- Camps are offering alternative learning centers as extensions of the school districts to enable in-person learning with expanded facilities and outdoor spaces as well as distance learning with their classmates and teachers.
- MCA members are offering spaces for independent schools for K-6 children to foster in-person learning environments for this school year as well as during holidays and vacations to support working parents and caregivers.
- MCA member camps provide out of school time programs, supporting parent's needs for safe learning environments after traditional school times.

Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) (representing 5 JCCs and 14 Summer Camps)

- JCCs and summer camps are complementing, supporting, or partnering with municipal school systems for remote locations and/or afterschool options. JCCs are offering onsite or remote services for children with disabilities and as respite for families and JCCs are serving senior citizens with daily program again.
- In service to their communities, JCCs and summer camps are providing Family Programming options for families on weekends, some are providing sites for food preparation, delivery, and collection for those homebound and/or in need and have been supporting other community organizations with facility sharing.
- More than 1000 campers attend affiliated summer camps throughout Massachusetts with hundreds of staff members.

Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs (representing 86 YMCA branches)

- The Massachusetts YMCAs are the largest provider of out-of-school time services in the state, serving 500,000 youth under 18 annually. During the pandemic the Massachusetts YMCAs responded rapidly by opening 50 emergency childcare sites, serving on average 1300 children a week or half of the children in care.
- The YMCAs ran camp for about 20,000 youth this summer, 40% of their normal amount. The YMCAs have also opened 140 remote learning centers serving 7,000 youth.
- The YMCAs have also responded to the growing need for food in their communities, seeing a 700% increase at their food distribution sites, the Ys will have served 15 Million meals in 2020.

Massachusetts Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (39 organizations representing 67 Club sites)

- • 39 Clubs offering onsite before and after school programming, in addition to 3,085 kids/day served by remote learning at Clubs in partnership with local school districts. 18 Clubs involved with local food distribution in their communities and 20 Clubs offering virtual programming in addition to onsite instruction.

Childcare staff in out-of-school educational and recreational settings such as camps and community centers are critical for continued support to serve the nation's health care, first responders, frontline and essential workers, as well as in assisting in the continued economic recovery of our country. Parents cannot return to work without a functioning out-of-school sector. In addition, front line childcare staff are disproportionately women and women of color. Given that Latino, American Indian and Black communities are more than 3.5 times more likely to suffer severe cases of COVID and death, there is an argument to be made for vaccinating all front-line childcare workers, including camp and out-of-school providers. **Inclusion of the 40,000 summer camp childcare related workers within the vaccination allocation and distribution along with those in the Education sector in Phase 2 is paramount for safeguarding public health and economic recovery.**

We therefore urge you to include these 40,000 workers in the vaccine allocation and distribution recommendations for the Education sector to be eligible for Phase 2 access to COVID-19 vaccinations, when available.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. We are available to answer any questions you or your staff might have. Please contact Matt Scholl at mscholl@bccymca.org.

Sincerely,

Matt Scholl,
MCA Board Chair

