



February 23, 2021

Secretary Mandy Cohen
NC Department of Health and Human Services
2001 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2000

Dear Secretary Cohen:

We write on behalf of the over 8500 North Carolinians experiencing homelessness that we serve, believing that NC DHHS should prioritize shelter staff and guests with group one for COVID vaccinations given the residential and high risk nature of this work.

The CDC in an update on 2/2/21, states that . . .

“Homeless services are often provided in congregate settings, which could facilitate the spread of infection, including infection caused by the virus that causes COVID-19. Because many people who are homeless are older adults or have underlying medical conditions, they may also be [at increased risk for severe illness](#). . . Because of the increased risk described above, some states have prioritized people experiencing homelessness and homeless service staff in earlier vaccination phases (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/vaccination-guidance.html>).”

We believe that allowing early access to vaccinations for both shelter staff and shelter guests aligns with this guidance. It is our understanding that members of the North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness (NCCEH) advocated for the inclusion of shelter staff and guests in group one but that these groups were not prioritized in group one when the vaccination schedule was released. We urge NC DHHS to reconsider this decision as soon as possible.

Given the federal emphasis on deploying the vaccine with an eye towards racial equity, it should be noted that, while people who identify as Black make up only 19% of the entire population in the NC Balance of State Continuum of Care’s 79 counties, the percentage of people who identify as Black increase when looking at homelessness (37%), and especially families (45%). Allowing shelter guests and staff to move up to group one also aligns with the NC DHHS’ stated goal to ensure that people of color are not left behind in the vaccination process.

Finally, many homeless service providers have been forced to use a dual-site model with a significant number of guests off-site in hotels and other temporary arrangements because of health risks associated with full occupancy in congregate living facilities where physical distancing is a challenge. Early vaccinations of staff and shelter guests will help these agencies return to a single-site model and will save considerable public resources.

It is clear over the last several weeks that changes have been made to the vaccination prioritization process to correct mistakes, incorporate flexibility, and ensure that vaccinations proceed state-wide in a timely and orderly manner. Together from across the state, we ask that NC DHHS act quickly to revise the State’s prioritization guidelines to include shelter staff and guests in due haste. We appreciate your consideration in this matter as supported by the following 94 organizations and 301 individuals across the State of North Carolina. Thank you for your service to the State and its residents.

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Organizations:

A Safe Place
Alliance Health
Asheville Poverty Initiative
Aura Home Women Vets
BeLoved Asheville
Burke County United Way
Caring for Children Eckerd Connects
Central Piedmont Community Action,
Inc. Church Community Service
Church of the Advocate / Red Door
Ministries City with Dwellings.org
Cleveland County Abuse Prevention
Council Cleveland County Rescue Mission
Community Crossroads Center
Community Empowerment Fund
Community Shelter of Union County
Diakonos, Inc.
disAbility Resource Center
Durham Rescue Mission
ECHO Ministry, Inc. The Ark
Families Moving Forward
Family Abuse Services of Alamance
County Family Care Center of Catawba
Valley, Inc. Family Promise of Gaston
County
Family Promise of Moore County
Family Promise of Wake County
First Presbyterian Church Asheville
Gang Free inc
Good Shepherd Center
H3 Health Healing Hope
Habitat for Humanity of Gaston County
Haywood Pathways Center
Hearts for the Homeless International
Helpmate
Henderson Connection Center
Home of Refuge Outreach Inc
Homeward Bound of WNC
Hope Recovery United Methodist Church
Inter-Faith Council for Social Service
(IFC) Interfaith Assistance Ministry
Isaac Homes Youth Shelter
LIFE Skills Foundation
Lincoln Community Health Center
Love Out Loud

Mecklenburg County Homeless Support
Services Metropolitan Community Health
Services, Inc. NC Coalition to End
Homelessness
NC Community Action Association
NC Education for Homeless Children and Youth
Program NC-506 Continuum of Care Board
New Bern Housing Authority
North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence
North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
Only Hope Wnc, Inc
Open Table Ministry, Inc.
Options
Orange Congregations In Mission
Orange County Public Library
Passage Home
Peter Elst Llc
Philippians Place
Pisgah Legal Services
Providence Baptist Church Worship Meal
Rape Crisis Center Robeson County
Reach of Clay County
RI International
RI International, Durham OBOT Program
Roof Above
Ruth's House
Safe Alliance
Safelight
Smoky Mountain Harm Reduction
Southeastern Family Violence Center
Spiritual Destiny Int'l Ministries, Inc
Standards Based Solutions
Success While In Transition LLC
The Alliance of AIDS Services - Carolina
The Cheerful Word
The Fellowship Home of Winston-Salem, NC, Inc
The Haven of Transylvania County
The Meeting Place Mission
The Salvation Army of Greater Winston-Salem
Thrive
TROSA (Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers) Inc.
Turning Point, Inc.
UNC Family Medicine
United Way of Henderson County
United Way of North Carolina
United Way of Robeson County
Urban Ministries of Durham
Vintage Photo Scan
Western Carolina Community Action
Western Carolina Rescue Ministries

Wounded Healers of NC

Individual Agency/Organization

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Aimee Zaas mD

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Alexandra Nelson-Tomlinson Open Table Ministry

Alice Beecher Homeward Bound of WNC

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Chelsea Glass
Cheryl Luckner Haywood St Mission
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Chris Ringwalt
Chrissy House Salvation Army of Hendersonville, NC
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Christina Cobos CEF
Christina Davis, RN/BSN
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Clinton Holt Safelight
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Jamie Wiener Children & Family Resource Center
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Kathleen Wiener United Way of Forsyth County
Kathy Scott Cleveland County Abuse Prevention Council Kathy Walker Pisgah Legal

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Nancy VanDrie Open Air Ministries
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House
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Rebecca Phillips Fifth Street Ministries
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TRAVIS G. DANIELS Pitt County
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Zach Meredith
Zachary Weir Diakonos, Inc.
Zena Hamilton