



February 8, 2021

Governor Mike DeWine
Office of the Governor
Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 S. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Director Stephanie McCloud
Ohio Department of Health
246 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor DeWine and Director McCloud:

On behalf of Essential Ohio, we recognize and appreciate the Governor's Office, Health Department, and other government agencies for all the work they have taken to protect public health amid the COVID-19 crisis. With vaccine distribution now underway, we are hopeful that we are in the beginning of the end of this pandemic. We write now to urge your administration to ensure Ohio's COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan explicitly includes vaccine protocols to protect Ohio's essential workers, including food and agricultural workers. Consistent with CDC recommendations (available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations.html>), we urge your team to proactively prioritize and plan for vaccine distribution access and information to these essential workers and communities. Furthermore, as the vaccine distribution process advances, it still remains of utmost importance to issue mandates that will hold employers accountable to protecting their employees in the workplace.

Because the U.S. supply of COVID-19 vaccine is limited, CDC has provided recommendations to state governments about who should be vaccinated early. CDC's recommendations are based on those from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), an independent panel of medical and public health experts. The recommendations were made with these goals in mind: decrease death and serious disease as much as possible, preserve functioning of society, and reduce the extra burden of COVID-19 on people already facing disparities.

On December 22, 2020, CDC recommended that in Phase 1b, vaccines should be offered to "frontline essential workers such as fire fighters, police officers, corrections officers, food and agricultural workers, United States Postal Service workers, manufacturing workers, grocery store workers, public transit workers, and those who work in the educational sector (teachers, support staff, and daycare workers.)"

Throughout much of 2020 and continuing to this day, many people are fortunate to be able to shelter themselves indoors for safety and isolation, but our essential workforce has not. In

addition, only some industries in Ohio have had the benefit of mandates and protections to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to the workers who have placed themselves in harm's way. These workers have taken on new risks to themselves and their families that have made it possible for others to stay safe and Ohio's economy to restart. One such example is found in Ohio's agricultural industry, which relies on a historically marginalized and vulnerable migrant workforce and has continued to employ and bring in thousands of workers to ensure that Ohioans and the rest of the country have food on their plates during this dangerous and challenging time.

Most migrant farmworkers in Ohio live in employer-provided migrant labor camps in rural, hard-to-reach areas. Thus, farmworkers are heavily reliant upon their employer for information and their safety during emergencies. Like agricultural workers on farms, poultry and livestock processing workers are among the lowest paid workers in the state and work under dangerous conditions. Their working conditions make them particularly vulnerable during the pandemic because they work in close proximity to each other and have little opportunity to take breaks to use the bathroom and wash their hands. We all depend on these workers. They deserve to be treated with dignity and to work in a place that is safe.

We implore you to adequately prepare for the vaccination of our essential workforce. As it pertains to farm and migrant workers, out-of-state workers will start to arrive soon, with rapidly increasing numbers into the late spring and through the summer. To protect essential workers, we ask for:

- Provision of vaccine distribution sites that are free from employer interference and influence,
- Advanced access to culturally sensitive informational materials in all relevant languages,
- Early interagency coordination with local health districts and any necessary international authorities (consulates, embassies, etc.),
- Assurances that all essential workers, including farm and migrant workers in Ohio receive access to the vaccine, and
- Provision of flexibility and paid time off to receive the vaccine, including paid time off if necessary to recover from potential side effects of the vaccine.

Essential Ohio also strongly encourages your administration and state public health officials to limit unnecessary identity documentation requirements and data collection of private information in its COVID-19 vaccination response, as this could have a chilling effect on some immigrant populations participating in the vaccination process. Coronavirus does not discriminate based on immigration status, and neither should our public health policies. All frontline workers should have access to vaccinations, including undocumented and uninsured workers. There are over [15,000 undocumented workers](#) in the food supply chain in Ohio and that covers only a portion of our undocumented essential workforce in this state. Immigrants who lack lawful status are often fearful of providing private information to state officials over concerns that they could be shared for non-public health purposes such as immigration enforcement. As such, we urge state officials to make clear as part of any public health campaign that any information will be kept private and not shared outside the public health context.

As Ohio plans for vaccine administration and distribution, we urge your team to proactively prioritize and plan for vaccine distribution access and information to agricultural workers and other essential workers, and take other steps to mitigate the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has wrought on communities of color and economically disadvantaged people.

Finally, amidst this critical vaccination process, we continue to call for mandates that will ensure employees are protected from COVID-19 in the workplace in the foreseeable future. Following a recent Executive Order from President Biden, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration released [stronger workplace guidance](#) for COVID-19 safety. This guidance provides critical information regarding what measures should be mandated and implemented in the workplace to ensure that all employees, including agricultural workers are protected from COVID-19.

We are available to meet and discuss the issues we have raised in this letter with your office and any other relevant officials, and we will continue to advocate with and on behalf of essential workers as the vaccine distribution process moves forward.

Sincerely,

Eugenio Mollo, Managing Attorney, Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc.

Mónica Ramírez, Founder and CEO, Justice for Migrant Women

Beatriz Maya, Executive Director, La Conexión

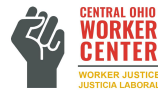
Deb Kline, Executive Director, Cleveland Jobs with Justice

Michael Shields, Researcher, Policy Matters Ohio

Lynn Tramonte, Director, Ohio Immigrant Alliance

Magda Orlander, Safety Trainer, Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center

Sarah Ingles, President, Central Ohio Worker Center



Essential Ohio is a state-wide campaign to create long-lasting changes for essential workers by raising standards in key sectors, improving safety, and increasing worker power. It is powered by Justice for Migrant Women, ABLE, the Ohio Immigrant Alliance, Cleveland Jobs with Justice, La Conexión, Policy Matters Ohio, Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center and Central Ohio Worker Center. Essential Ohio is part of a national campaign, Always Essential.