



December 15, 2020

Commissioner Jan Malcolm
Minnesota Department of Health
625 Robert Street N., Saint Paul, MN 55101

Dear Commissioner Malcolm,

As Minnesota receives its first doses of a vaccine for COVID-19, we are writing to offer insight that will be valuable in plotting an effective distribution strategy. After the vaccine has reached front-line healthcare workers and people in long-term care facilities, it will be essential that the vaccine quickly reach the other Minnesotans 1) most at risk of infection and 2) most at risk of serious complications.

We propose that state and local health officials could efficiently address these vaccination priorities by focusing on the nearly 8,000 units of high-rise public housing in Minneapolis and St. Paul, as well as the 110 other housing agencies in Minnesota with elderly and disabled affordable housing.

MPHA and SPPHA serve thousands of elderly people, many with underlying health concerns, living in close conditions. The latest data available on MPHA's highrises from the Minneapolis Health Department make the argument best:

- Of MPHA high-rise COVID-19 cases since March, **59% were over 65 years old.**
- At least **80% have been people of color.**
- **39% of MPHA highrise cases required hospitalization**, versus *just 7%* in Minneapolis overall.
- **The mortality rate for MPHA-resident COVID-19 cases has been 7%**, versus *1.2%* citywide.

While there is not readily available data for SPPHA and the many other publicly owned or subsidized highrises throughout the State of Minnesota, it is undisputed that public housing authorities across the state serve many of Minnesota's most vulnerable citizens.

MPHA and SPPHA employees and residents have worked with great determination during this pandemic to protect their communities and limit the spread of COVID-19. Through local partners, MPHA and SPPHA have successfully brought testing to many of our buildings and we will continue to do so throughout the pandemic. However, the sooner we can bring the vaccine to the people we serve, the sooner we can end the disparate extent to which they are suffering hospitalization and death.

Our goal is to continue to safely house our residents and help them thrive. Prioritizing public housing residents would be part of a sound, data-driven strategy to meet the stated priorities of the CDC and MDH, as well as a matter of health equity. We will be glad to discuss with you further how we can coordinate in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

Abdi Warsame
Executive Director/CEO
Minneapolis Public Housing Authority

Jon Gutzmann
Executive Director
St. Paul Public Housing Agency

Copy:

Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan

Minnesota Housing Commissioner Jennifer Ho

Minnesota Housing Deputy Commissioner Rachel Robinson

Kris Ehresmann, Director MDH IDEPC Division

MPHA Board of Commissioners

SPPHA Board of Commissioners

Office of Senator Tina Smith

Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar

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Minneapolis Local Elected Delegation

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Minnesota NAHRO

Local public health officials