

A Resolution in support of expanded local discretion in the fight against COVID-19

RESOLUTION #2021-_____

Whereas, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) constitutes arguably the most serious health threat facing the United States in the past century, the pandemic having afflicted more than 26 million persons in our nation and costing up to 450,000 lives, including nearly 45,000 fatalities within New York State, at least 25 of whom resided within Tompkins County; and

Whereas, federal, New York State and local authorities agree that widespread public vaccination, particularly of the elderly and other vulnerable populations, serves as the most effective long-term measure to combat this disease; and

Whereas, Tompkins County, in cooperation with its hospital and local health agencies and providers, has responded by constructing and staffing a modern, efficient, and highly effective Point of Distribution for COVID-19 vaccinations, a facility that has received statewide and national recognition, and whose personnel stand ready to vaccinate as many persons as State-supplied vaccine allocations permit; and

Whereas, New York State authorities have in recent weeks severely curtailed vaccine allocations to this facility, preferring to divert large quantities of vaccine to State-run facilities far removed from our community, and also to rely exclusively upon pharmacy distribution to provide vaccine to elderly populations, a system that has proven to be haphazard, uncoordinated and unreliable, and has frustrated many senior citizens to the point of despair; and

Whereas, Tompkins County officials, including its County Administrator and its Public Health Director, have repeatedly expressed concern about the State's denial of adequate vaccine to this community and most immediately about the State's explicit prohibition against use of Health Department vaccine allocations to inoculate persons over age 65; and

Whereas, those local officials have also objected to the State's categorical prohibition against local initiation and establishment of any waiting list or lists of prospective vaccine recipients, or of those local staff's facilitating appointments for said vaccinations unless and until the State determines local vaccine supplies are adequate to schedule appointments; and

Whereas, senior citizens and their advocates within the Town of Enfield and elsewhere locally have voiced to members of this Town Board and to other Town Boards their immediate desire for advance registration opportunities for vaccination, and also their need for an easily-accessible, human-staffed, telephone-based local registration system, one designed to best suit the knowledge and abilities of the elderly and of those with limited computer skills; and

Whereas, the chaotic, overly-complex, and State-micromanaged vaccine distribution system has led one local municipal official to declare that seniors in search of vaccination feel "hopeless and abandoned," and has also prompted a recognized local leader of this Town to assert that our "elected officials are failing our elderly residents," sentiments shared by members of this Town Board; therefore be it

Resolved, that the Enfield Town Board strongly urges and recommends that New York State authorities, including its Governor and its State Health Commissioner, delegate expanded discretion in the fight against COVID-19 to local community officials and assign increased priority to locally-managed

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distribution plans for the coronavirus vaccine, including but not limited to utilization locally of the Tompkins County Health Department's coordinated vaccine distribution system; and be it further

Resolved, that this Town Board recommends that New York State authorities immediately and significantly relax their overly-rigid and unnecessarily-centralized control of coronavirus vaccine distribution so as to permit local Health Departments, including the Tompkins County Health Department, to prioritize vaccinations based on local conditions and needs within the broad categories otherwise defined by applicable State and Federal government regulations; and be it further

Resolved, that this Town Board recommends New York State authorities permit local communities to establish telephone-based and actively-staffed vaccine registration hotlines, and that those services be authorized to compile waiting lists of eligible vaccine recipients; that said services permit local officials to exercise sufficient flexibility and discretion and to design systems in a user-friendly format that senior citizens and other vulnerable populations can most effectively utilize; and that local officials, indeed, establish such services; and be it further

Resolved, that a copy of this Resolution shall be shared with the following State and Tompkins County officials: The Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo, New York Governor; Dr. Howard A. Zucker, M.D., New York State Commissioner of Health; the Hon. Thomas F. O'Mara, New York State Senator; Dr. Anna R. Kelles, New York State Assemblymember; the Hon. Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Chair, Tompkins County Legislature; Jason Molino, Tompkins County Administrator; Frank Kruppa, Tompkins County Public Health Commissioner; and the Secretary of the Tompkins County Council of Governments.

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