

## Governor DeWine:

We urge you to prioritize Black Ohioans, who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 complications and deaths, for COVID-19 vaccination distribution. We need the following for Black Ohioans:

1. Reprioritization of the vaccination distribution to include racial and ethnic minorities who COVID-19 disproportionately impacts.
2. Implement mandatory training at the state and local level for vaccination data collection to ensure best practices for data collection for race and ethnicity.
3. Collaboration with trusted entities in Black communities, outside of medical institutions, to accelerate vaccination distribution in predominately Black communities.

Over 20 cities and counties in Ohio took the bold step to declare “racism as a public health crisis.” In doing so, we recognize the profound impact that systemic racism has on Black communities the widening of health disparities. Governor DeWine, you have a critical opportunity to act and address the disparate impact Covid-19 has on Black Ohioans. Preliminary data show that less than three percent (3%) of the Black population were vaccinated in Cuyahoga County, despite making up about 30% of the county’s population. In contrast, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, who comprise about three percent (3%) of the population, have higher vaccination rates. Our request is not to “take-away” vaccination from other vulnerable populations; it is to recalibrate the formula, not unintentionally driving more inequities. Under your leadership, the Ohio Department of Health guided vaccination distribution document lists “racial and ethnic minorities” as a vulnerable population and at risk for exposure to COVID-19, including severe illness and death. Yet, Black Ohioans are not a priority in current vaccination dissemination. The essential workers who have remained on the front lines during this pandemic, working in grocery stores, in childcare centers, and other critical professions heavily occupied by African Americans, do not have access to the vaccination they so desperately need. It is imperative that vaccine distribution is done equitably, and this action be taken swiftly.

We must also require vaccination distribution sites to participate in mandatory training on best practices for race and ethnicity data collection and make the required data fields for vaccine recipients. To fully understand how COVID-19 impacts Black communities, there is a need to strengthen data collection and reporting of race and ethnicity data. Ohio Department of Health reports over 100,000 vaccination distributions in the State of Ohio that do not account for race and ethnicity. In September 2020, the Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) released a health data brief, Ohio COVID-19 disparities by race and ethnicity: September update, where they

expressed the need for better data collection. If vaccinations continue without collecting race and ethnicity data, we know the disparities will not be addressed. Vaccination distribution sites must be required to collect this critical demographic information.

Finally, we urge you to collaborate with Black communities' trusted entities to accelerate vaccinations of Black Ohioans. This is a recommendation outlined in the COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force: Interim Report—a report that your office commissioned. We have seen firsthand how such collaborations are useful, as Urban Leagues across the State of Ohio collaborated to increase community-based Covid-19 testing. You must expand vaccine access to Black communities. These partnerships will accelerate vaccination distribution to Black Ohioans.

When the pandemic hit our community in March 2020, Ohio was a national leader in its effort to slow the spread of Covid-19. Throughout the country and in our State, we see disparities in vaccination distribution. Ohio has an opportunity to be the leader and save lives by prioritizing vaccine distribution for the communities devastated by Covid-19 over the past ten months. Lives are at stake and will be significantly impacted by the choices you make moving forward. As you have stated recently, it is imperative to make this process equitable. The recent emphasis on taking the vaccination to affordable senior housing is one strategy. However, there must be an overall focus on prioritizing Black people and communities of color to combat this disease's detrimental impacts, as recommended in the COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force: Interim Report and COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force Blue Print. In Ohio's Executive Response: A Plan of Action to Advance Equity (August 2020), you said, "inequities can only be changed through intentional actions to break down barriers." Today, Governor, we ask that you stand by your word and breakdown barriers preventing Black Ohioans from accessing COVID-19 vaccinations. We must take intentional and collaborative actions to address the inequities plaguing COVID-19 in the Black community.

We stand prepared to work with you and your team to plan and implement an equitable COVID-19 vaccination distribution strategy. Please follow up to let us know how you plan to address their commendations outlined in this letter. The Governor's Office may send correspondence to [Ashlee Young, ayoung@ulgso.org](mailto:Ashlee.Young@ulgso.org).

**Teresa R. LeGrair**, President & CEO, Akron Urban League

**Stephanie Hightower**, President & CEO, Columbus Urban League

**Diane Robinson**, President & CEO, Greater Stark County Urban League, Inc.

**Thomas S. Conley**, President & CEO, Greater Warren-Youngstown Urban League

**Parris M. Smith**, President & CEO, Lorain County Urban League

**Marsha A. Mockabee**, President & CEO, Urban League of Greater Cleveland

**Eddie L. Koen**, President & CEO, Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio