

# California State Senate

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SENATOR  
**MARÍA ELENA DURAZO**  
TWENTY-FOURTH SENATE DISTRICT



STANDING COMMITTEES  
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HOUSING  
APPROPRIATIONS  
JUDICIARY

February 16, 2021

Governor Gavin Newsom  
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

*Drafting Guidelines Workgroup*

Co-Chairperson Oliver Brooks, MD, CMO, Watts Health Care Corporation and Immediate Past President, NMA (National Medical Association)

Co-Chairperson Robert Schechter, MD, MPH, Chief, Immunizations Branch, CDPH

*Community Advisory Vaccine Committee*

California Surgeon General Nadine Burke Harris, MD

CC:

Dr. Tomás Aragón, Public Health Director California Department of Public Health  
PO Box 997377, MS 0500  
Sacramento, CA 95899

**RE: Vaccine distribution in immigration detention**

Dear Governor Newsom, Dr. Brooks, Dr. Schechter, Surgeon General Harris and Dr. Aragón:

We are writing to inquire as to any plans or priorities in place with respect to the vaccination of hundreds of people currently detained in immigration detention facilities in the state of California. To date, we have heard conflicting reports about what agency is ultimately responsible for the vaccination of these individuals, with the Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announcing that it would leave it up to states to decide when to vaccinate this population.

We believe that immigrants are a vital part of our communities, and are essential to the identity of California as a state. Today, hundreds of California residents are affected by the issue of immigration detention, with a parent, spouse, children or loved ones separated from their families and held in immigrant detention facilities.

One of the six indicators put forth by the administration to reopen the state is the ability to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in facilities which are vulnerable to infection, including detention



facilities. It is imperative that our state has a plan in place to vaccinate individuals in congregate settings and detention facilities - where 90 of the 100 largest COVID-19 cluster outbreaks have taken place.

Five of the six facilities used to hold immigrants in California are private for-profit facilities, which continue to operate below the appropriate health and safety standards. Your administration has shown awareness of the threat posed by these facilities and exercised leadership on this issue when you banned the use of private prisons under AB 32. Unfortunately, until these facilities are ultimately phased out they remain a threat to those detained inside, individuals who work there, and the community at large.

The American Medical Association has recently adopted a policy in support of improved health measures of prioritizing vaccine access to vulnerable individuals in immigrant detention. The policy notes, "Recognizing that detention center and correctional workers, incarcerated people, and detained immigrants are at high risk for COVID-19, the new policy also makes clear that these individuals should be prioritized in receiving access to safe, effective COVID-19 vaccines in the initial phases of distribution."

In addition to these considerations, we would also like to emphasize the critical role that the state can play in fostering trust and providing information to those detained. Immigrants in detention continue to share serious apprehensions with respect to receiving vaccinations from ICE or private detention operators, therefore we would also urge the state to play a role in providing information and access to those inside these facilities.

We have also heard from advocates that detainees inside the Otay Mesa detention facility, been vaccinated by ICE. It is not clear why this population has been provided access to the vaccine while detainees in other facilities have not. We would ask your assistance in clarifying the circumstances surrounding this news and inquiring as to the reasons behind these decisions.

We therefore kindly request your response to the following questions:

- 1.) What if any communications have taken place between California and the federal government with respect to the vaccination of individuals in ICE custody?
- 2.) What plan, timeline or arrangements have been made with respect to the vaccination of immigrants in ICE custody?
- 3.) Are individuals prioritized under the current plan by California (for example, individuals above 65 years of age) but in ICE custody, eligible to be vaccinated?
- 4.) What plans are in place to bridge the serious challenge of lack of trust and information for those held in these facilities with respect to medical access and vaccine distribution?

Should you have any questions or concerns, and for providing follow up answers to these please contact Fernando Ramirez in Senator Durazo's office at [fernando.ramirez@sen.ca.gov](mailto:fernando.ramirez@sen.ca.gov). Thank you very much for your assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,



MARÍA ELENA DURAZO  
Senator, 24th District



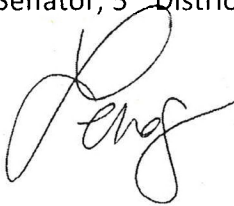
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CONNIE LEYVA  
Senator, 20th District



SHARON QUIRK-SILVA  
Assemblywoman, 65th District



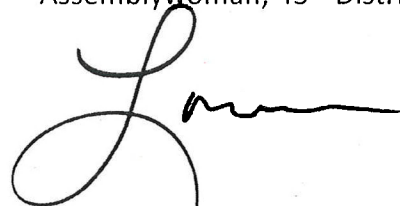
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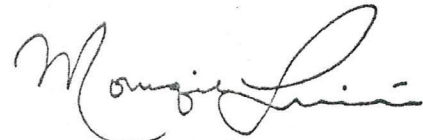
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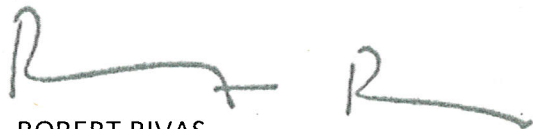
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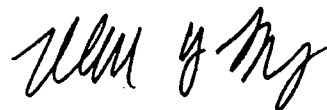
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