

**WATERTOWN HOUSING AUTHORITY**  
EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

55 WAVERLEY AVENUE  
WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472-3613

[617] 923-3950 – Office  
[617] 923.3961 – Maintenance

[617] 923.3954 – Leased Housing  
[617] 923-2466 - FAX

Dear Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders:

Thank you for recognizing in your COVID Vaccine Distribution Plan that congregate settings pose special risks for COVID spread, and for also prioritizing communities with “high social vulnerability” and for applying a social justice lens.

It is not completely clear that you intend to include affordable and public senior housing in this first phase, although we offer congregate settings for especially vulnerable people—by virtue of both age and income. Assisted living settings are called out in phase one—a very large number of residents of senior affordable and public housing have extremely comparable profiles to those in assisted living but could never afford that setting. In fact, many of our residents are frailer than those in assisted living and are nursing home-eligible. Thus, **the logic of your plan suggests residents of affordable and public senior housing must be included in phase one** and we urge you to make that happen. We pledge our full cooperation to make it as seamless as possible. As you well know, the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended that HUD’s Section 202 affordable senior housing be in the first phase. The ACIP was wise in including 202 housing in the first tier of priority. Since Massachusetts leads the way in providing additional forms of affordable housing for seniors, for our state the definition should be broadened to include all senior affordable and public housing.

Similar to assisted living and rest homes, the high density environments in senior affordable housing place our buildings at high risk for rapid COVID spread. With many residents in their mid-80s and 90’s, such spread would surely result in a very high number of lengthy hospitalizations and death. The vaccine is also urgently needed in affordable and public senior housing to restore some level of community life and social connection. For residents in their mid-90’s, another few months of waiting is a disproportionately large portion of their remaining lives, and we owe it to them to make it better. Many affordable housing providers offer extensive services to support elders remaining at home, such as arranging for assistance with activities of daily living, food supports, specialized senior fitness and wellness (such as arthritis exercise programs and diabetes self-management). These supportive housing sites have populations that mirror those in assisted living settings and even nursing homes. For example, in one emblematic provider’s portfolio, 35% of residents are 85 or older, compared to 40% at nursing homes statewide. Roughly 2/3 of those residents receive some form of assistance from caregivers. **We urge you to include affordable senior housing in the first round of vaccine distributions.**

Thank you very much,



---

Michael A. Lara  
Executive Director  
Watertown Housing Authority