

March 11, 2021

VIA US MAIL AND EMAIL

Ellen LaPointe
Dr. Alex Gonzalez, MD, MPH
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Re: Vaccine Access Equity in Communities of Color

Dear Ms. LaPointe and Dr. Gonzalez:

Lawyers for Civil Rights has been approached by community-based non-profit organizations—including Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA), the Brazilian Worker Center (BWC), Haitian-Americans United (HAU), and the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA)—that are eager to partner with hospitals and medical facilities to distribute the much-needed COVID-19 vaccines to hard-hit communities of color.

Community-based organizations have followed with excitement the vaccination progress made possible by the partnership between the La Colaborativa and the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center. Through that partnership, the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center was able to open a vaccination site at La Colaborativa’s headquarters in Chelsea—a city that emerged as a COVID-19 “hotspot,” but nevertheless was initially only provided a single general pharmacy vaccination site by the Commonwealth.¹ Our community partners are eager to replicate La Colaborativa’s model and would welcome your support.

Partnerships between medical centers and nonprofit community organizations could successfully provide vaccinations in neighborhoods with Black, Latinx, and immigrant individuals and families. The community-driven model established by La Colaborativa and the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center fosters trust between immigrants and people of color on the one hand and medical organizations on the other. It also promotes culturally-competent and linguistically-relevant vaccine access—critical elements for organizations such as IBA, BWC, HAU, and CPA.

¹ *Local groups in Chelsea team up to launch a hard-earned vaccination site*, Boston Globe (updated February 3, 2021) (retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/02/04/nation/chelsea-early-epicenter-covid-outbreak-local-groups-team-up-launch-vaccination-site-their-own/>); *EBNHC, La Colaborativa to Roll Out Chelsea Vaccination Site Thursday*, Chelsea Record (February 4, 2021) (retrieved from <https://chelsearecord.com/2021/02/04/ebnhc-la-colaborativa-to-roll-out-chelsea-vaccination-site-thursday/>); see also COVID-19 vaccination locations, Mass.gov (accessed March 10, 2021) (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccination-locations>).

By way of example, IBA has a strong interest in establishing a vaccination site in the Villa Victoria housing community in Boston's South End neighborhood. Villa Victoria is an affordable housing community with predominantly Latinx residents, and is well-situated to serve the vaccination needs for the sizeable Latinx community in the South End. For instance, Villa Victoria has a large, open-air plaza as well as indoor community spaces, all of which could be utilized as vaccination sites. Critically, Villa Victoria is also a space that is well-known within the Latinx community and thus could promote the goal of overcoming vaccine hesitancy resulting from cultural concerns and language barriers.

IBA, BWC, HAU, and CPA are eager to set-up vaccination tents and to host mobile vaccination units. They are also eager to foster culturally-competent and linguistically-relevant vaccine access.

On a parallel track, LCR has requested a meeting with Governor Charlie Baker, Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, and Department of Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel to discuss an expansion of the Commonwealth's partnership with CIC Health in order to facilitate vaccine distribution in the neighborhoods contemplated by our nonprofit community-based partners. **Similarly, we would welcome an opportunity to convene a meeting with you and our non-profit community-based partners to explore the possibility of establishing a successful partnership for community-based vaccination.** Please feel free to follow up with Nina Garcia at ngarcia@lawyersforcivilrights.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Nina Garcia
Melanie Gleason
Erin Fowler
Iván Espinoza-Madrigal