



Hospice & Palliative Care Network
OF MARYLAND

August 16, 2021

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.
Governor of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Mandating COVID-19 Vaccines

Dear Governor Hogan,

On behalf of LifeSpan Network, LeadingAge Maryland, the Health Facilities Association of Maryland (HFAM), the Hospice & Palliative Care Network of Maryland and the Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), we thank you for your continued commitment to Marylanders in need during novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As you know, vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions have been especially susceptible to COVID-19 at home and across all health care settings. Given that these vulnerable individuals are often cared for in skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers, assisted living communities, and other care settings, the senior sector has been at the epicenter of the pandemic.

Maryland skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers, assisted living communities and other health care entities have worked tirelessly to educate and provide trusted information to staff on the importance of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. For example, because of these efforts, 76.6% of staff in nursing homes are fully vaccinated and 78.5% have received a first dose. However, we acknowledge that, like Maryland, these percentages fluctuate by county and some nursing homes are below 50% in staff vaccinations.

Some Maryland skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers, assisted living communities, and other health care entities have taken the step to mandate the vaccine for their staff - a step that we applaud. While the list of organizations that have mandated vaccination is growing almost daily, it is not enough. We have already begun to see unvaccinated staff "shuffle" from one organization to another when the organization mandates the COVID-19 vaccine. This "shuffling" is not just within long-term and post-acute care settings, but throughout the entire health care sector. The fact

of the matter is, in the aggregate, the health care industry uses the same State certified and degreed staff, making it imperative to address the vaccination issue across all of health care.

Therefore, with the emergence of the more contagious Delta variant, inevitable future variants, and the need for COVID-19 booster vaccinations, we believe that it is now necessary to require all Maryland health care workers across settings who provide patient care to be vaccinated, except when there is the appropriate religious and medical exemption. To account for possible staff turnover, the State should also consider providing temporary relief of minimum staffing requirements and or ratios during the immediate period around the vaccination deadline.

By the State mandating vaccination, it would help alleviate the concern that a staff member in one organization would simply quit rather than be vaccinated and go work in another that did not require it, exacerbating the health care worker shortage and the possible shuffling of staff, which would not be in anyone's best interest. While we acknowledge some staff may simply leave the health care industry rather than be vaccinated, that is a risk worth taking to ensure the health and safety of residents and of our vaccinated staff. The first value of medical care is to do no harm, and during this pandemic the number one step a direct care professional can take is to be vaccinated.

Therefore, to further control the spread of COVID-19, especially in light of the Delta variant, we request that you mandate that all health care workers providing patient care be required to be fully vaccinated within sixty (60) days of the date of the order. Again, we thank you for your leadership over the last eighteen months and the opportunity to continue to work together.

Sincerely,



Kevin Heffner
President & CEO
LifeSpan Network



Joseph DeMattos, Jr.
President & CEO
HFAM



Allison Ciborowski
President & CEO
LeadingAge MD



Peggy Funk, CAE
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Gene M. Ransom, III
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cc: The Honorable Dennis Schrader, Secretary, Maryland Department of Health
Patricia Nay, M.D., Director, Office of Health Care Quality
Ali Keane, Deputy Chief of Staff, Governor's Office