



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE “NIKKI” FRIED
THE CAPITOL

March 1, 2021

The Honorable James E. Clyburn, Chairman
House Select Committee on the Coronavirus Crisis
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steve Scalise, Ranking Member
House Select Committee on the Coronavirus Crisis
2105 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Majority Whip Clyburn and Minority Whip Scalise,

As you may have seen, there are numerous alarming reports of alleged political favoritism by Governor Ron DeSantis in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccine doses throughout the State of Florida. As an independently-elected member of the Florida Cabinet, my office has received frequent complaints regarding the unequal distribution of vaccines.

According to [reports](#), “DeSantis allowed politically-connected private developers to dole out the life-saving drug to residents of their upscale communities, bypassing systems set up to ensure equitable access to vaccines.” On at least three separate occasions, “pop-up” vaccine distributions have been organized in wealthy communities affiliated with donors to the Governor’s political campaigns.

Earlier this month, a “pop-up” vaccine distribution occurred in two affluent ZIP codes after “DeSantis ... quietly contacted a campaign donor, a real estate developer whose company built Lakewood Ranch, a mostly Republican, mainly White master-planned community in Manatee County.” The distribution included a “VIP list” for vaccine access arranged by a local official and political ally of Governor DeSantis, now [under investigation](#) for potential abuse of power.

Since then, additional incidents have been uncovered. A “pop-up” vaccination at an [upscale community](#) occurred in Sarasota County, tied to a real estate developer who “gave \$25,000 to the Governor’s political committee and served on his transition team” and who said that “he was contacted by DeSantis to help.” An additional Charlotte County “pop-up” vaccine distribution occurred “in a gated country club community where some homes are priced at more than \$1 million” tied to the same developer.

In response to media questions on political favoritism of events allegedly “[only meant](#) to serve wealthy, Republican-leaning residents,” Governor DeSantis referred to complaints as “[a joke](#)” and “[threatened](#) to send future pop-up vaccination sites elsewhere.”

Similarly, the Governor has [allegedly withheld](#) vaccine doses, in an act of potential political retribution, from the largely Hispanic, predominantly Cuban-American city of Hialeah whose mayor has been critical of DeSantis’ questionable leadership on COVID-19, stating, “we’re the fifth-largest city in the state of Florida and the one most affected, and we have no communication and no help whatsoever from the Governor or his office.”

[According to reports](#), wealthy individuals in Florida are securing a disproportionate number of vaccine appointments, “benefiting residents of [areas] who have fared relatively well – including some with ties to the Governor.” These exclusive vaccine drives have also contributed to a widening racial disparity in vaccinations in Florida, in which only 4.3 percent of Black residents and 4.8 percent of Hispanic residents have been vaccinated, compared to 11 percent of White residents.

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These disturbing incidents are indicative of an inept distribution of vaccines at best, and corrupt political patronage at worst. I have [previously requested](#) that the Governor activate the Florida National Guard to oversee an efficient, centralized COVID-19 vaccine distribution system, a request that remains urgent today given Florida's status in the lower half of state vaccination rates.

Given the numerous serious questions regarding the Governor's impartiality and potential political corruption in distributing life-saving vaccines, I encourage your committee to initiate a congressional inquiry into Florida's vaccine distribution procedures, including compelling the production of any testimony, records, and documents as you see fit.

The stakes are too high for any of Florida's seniors, farmworkers, teachers, healthcare workers, and frontline workers to fall prey to COVID-19 because of political favors doled out by our state's chief executive. I ask you to act swiftly in investigating this matter.

Sincerely,



Nicole Fried
Florida Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services

cc: The Honorable Maxine Waters (D-CA)
The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY)
The Honorable Nydia M. Velazquez (D-NY)
The Honorable Bill Foster (D-IL)
The Honorable Jamie Raskin (D-MD)
The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL)
The Honorable Jim Jordan (R-OH)
The Honorable Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO)
The Honorable Jackie Walorski (R-IN)
The Honorable Mark E. Green, M.D. (R-TN)