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## Florida Congressional Democrats Seek Equity, Revision of Immigrant Vaccination Roadblocks

*Washington D.C.* – A group of Florida Congressional Democrats today asked top federal and state officials to address rules around residency requirements in Florida that prevent immigrant populations from accessing vaccines and to remedy this growing disparity and make it possible for greater numbers of the at-risk migrant population to secure vaccinations.

The requests – one to Florida Gov. **Ron DeSantis**, and the other to U.S. Homeland Security Secretary **Alexander Mayorkas** and Health and Human Services Secretary **Xavier Becerra** – seek to revise the residency roadblocks that prevent farmworkers and other undocumented workers from being inoculated, as well as working with public health experts, local organizations, and consulates to provide vaccines to these vulnerable communities. It is a population that not only has faced increased COVID-19 risks, but one that also serves as a vital link in the food supply for the state and nation.

U.S. Rep. **Debbie Wasserman Schultz** (FL-23) led a letter, signed by several Florida Congressional Democrats, seeking assistance on this issue from Florida’s governor. U.S. Rep. **Ted Deutch** (FL-22) led a similar letter signed by the same lawmakers to federal officials.

“Keeping all Floridians safe in this pandemic means knocking down vaccination roadblocks for our most vulnerable residents,” Wasserman Schultz said. “As vaccine access opens to all adults around the nation, we need to move to ensure stringent residency documents don’t hinder our larger mission of safer and healthier communities.”

“Every person who calls Florida home should have easy access to this lifesaving vaccine in our state,” Deutch said. “If we ignore gaps in access to the vaccine or impose barriers that make those gaps worse, then we are only jeopardizing peoples’ lives and weakening our efforts to end this pandemic and rebuild our economy.”

The request to DeSantis stressed that the risks for immigrant populations merit immediate action, especially since they are an integral part of the communities in Florida.

“Undocumented immigrants are likely to live in communities where COVID-19 outcomes are more severe and work in jobs that make social distancing difficult. Further, because migrant farmworkers and their families travel to work in Florida, they may be increasing the spread of the virus across state lines,” the letter from lawmakers to DeSantis states. “These individuals live in, work in, and interact in our communities, and without proper access to vaccines, these populations may exacerbate community spread, which affects all Floridians, and can impact our health system. The need to vaccinate as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, is becoming even more dire as highly transmissible variants spread rapidly across the state.”

Likewise, the letter to Homeland Secretary **Mayorkas** and Health and Human Services Secretary **Becerra** stressed that the need for the changes would provide broader public health protections and speed up the return to normalcy for all Floridians.

“Current proof of residency requirements present a serious obstacle to vaccination among undocumented immigrant and migrant and seasonal farmworker communities. It is our understanding that federally-supported sites currently are requiring documentation consistent with the Governor’s Executive Order and Florida Surgeon General’s advisory,” the letter from lawmakers to HHS Secretary Mayorkas said. “We ask that you consider ending residency requirements for vaccination at federally-supported sites as soon as possible, which will help to expedite our progress toward a robust return to normal and better protect the health and safety of everyone who calls Florida, and America, home.”

The signatories on each letter also include Reps. **Lois Frankel** (FL-21) and **Darren Soto** (FL-09).