

March 29th, 2022

Dear Governor Whitmer, Lt. Governor Gilchrist, and Director Hertel,

Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been more than 2 million cases of COVID-19 in Michigan, resulting in more than 31,000 deaths. As we faced an unknown global pandemic, we saw the world adopt practices of the disability community: wearing masks to protect each other, engaging in caregiving and mutual aid, and joining community events virtually. Wisdom from disabled people has benefited all people, as we've collectively grappled with reduced mobility and other logistical challenges due to the pandemic.

Historically, disabled people have been our own champions, advocating for access at every turn. This pandemic is no different. Since 2020, we have advocated for public protections from a virus that [disproportionately affects our community](#), but we have been met by government leadership who lack an in-depth understanding of disability equity at nearly every level.

Detroit Disability Power and other local disability champions have advocated for:

- Accessible resources on COVID-19, testing, vaccinations, mask protocols, and other precautionary measures
- Public mask mandates in indoor spaces, especially congregate settings
- Data on how and to what degree COVID-19 has impacted disability communities
- Protection from healthcare discrimination & medical rationing when resources are scarce, as well as transparency about how these decisions are made
- Prioritized access to COVID-19 vaccines
- Accessible vaccination sign-ups and clinics
- Accessible at-home COVID tests
- Increased and prioritized access to COVID antiviral treatments

Despite some of our hard fought wins, the State of Michigan has yet to build a sustainable framework for responding to COVID-19 or future pandemics. In February 2022, the CDC updated their masking guidance, easing how risk levels are calculated, in order to appease the nondisabled majority who want to go back to "normal." This new guidance reflects an ableist attitude in which it is an individual's responsibility to navigate the pandemic instead of a communal one. Once again, disability communities were told we're on our own.

However, government leadership has an obligation to protect all Michigan residents. As the fourth surge subsides, **now is the time to build a public health infrastructure that benefits us all. We need clear and measurable roadmaps for how our disabled communities are going to be taken care of** because we have been left behind time and time again. We deserve to be more than an afterthought. **Our lives and, just as importantly, our ability to thrive in our beloved Michigan, depend on having a proactive plan in place.**

Therefore, we urge you to release a detailed and measurable plan for:

- **Increasing the number of vaccinated disabled Michiganders.**

- Partner with community-based organizations serving disabled individuals to host and/or promote local, accessible vaccine clinics
- Provide free, high filtration masks to clinic participants and their families
- Display and distribute plain language COVID resources
- Ensure access to language interpretation services, including American Sign Language (ASL)
- Provide disability competency trainings for vaccine clinic health professionals
- Create guidelines for vaccine clinics to create accessible, sensory-friendly, and scent-free environments
- Create an accessible one-stop-shop website that allows Michiganders to easily find local public health guidance, locate tools like high filtration masks, track vaccine dates, set reminders for residents to get their boosters, and provide a map of local vaccine clinics and their hours and contact information
- **Creating concrete, easy-to-understand, and transparent metrics for mask mandates and vaccine requirements in public spaces, especially congregate settings.**
 - Collaborate and consult with disabled Michiganders! Prioritize the most at risk. Leaders and decision-makers must include those who are most affected
 - Release preparedness plans that consider the number of cases and local test positivity
 - Set and publish the specific thresholds that trigger precautions
 - Describe how precautions will differ in congregate settings including schools and long term care facilities
 - Keep COVID dashboards updated with the information above
- **Protecting people with disabilities from healthcare rationing.**
 - Ban the use of Quality Adjusted Life Years or long-term survivability by any state agency, or recipients of state financial assistance from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, both directly and through third-party assessments
 - Require each recipient of state financial assistance to publicly report their crisis standards of care and healthcare rationing policies and require a period of public comment from the community the recipient services
 - Develop & provide disability competency trainings regarding anti-discrimination and anti-care-rationing for healthcare professionals
- **Capturing disability-related COVID data.**
 - Collect and report data on the state's COVID dashboard including how many disabled Michiganders have contracted, become seriously ill from, been hospitalized by, died from, and been vaccinated against COVID-19
 - Create a Disability Disparities Task Force to analyze the data above and publish reports and recommendations (similar to [this report](#) from the Governor's Racial Disparities Task Force)

No matter what we look like, where we live, or what's in our wallets, getting sick reminds us that we're all human. We can pull through by pulling together, like we have done in the past. This means going all in to ensure everyone has the access and care they need to thrive.

[Read more about COVID's disproportionate impact on people with disabilities here.](#)

Sincerely,

Dessa Cosma, Executive Director, Detroit Disability Power

Vendela M Collins, Executive Director, MI Developmental Disabilities Council

Camile Proctor, Executive Director, The Color of Autism Foundation

Theresa Metzmaker Executive Director, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition

Sherry Boyd, Executive Director, The Arc Michigan

Michelle Roberts, Executive Director, Disability Rights Michigan

Leslynn R. Angel, President & CEO, Michigan United Cerebral Palsy (MI-UCP)

Marianne E. Huff, President and CEO, Mental Health Association in Michigan

Lewis A. Gossage, Executive Director, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living

Lynn Maginity, Executive Director, New Gateways Inc

Jason Schmidt, Executive Director, New Life Services, Inc.

Lisa M. Nygord, Executive Director, Arc Dearborn

Natasha Abner, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Michigan

Zach Cardinell, Board President, AMORC

Zach Damon, Chairman, The Ann Arbor Commission on Disability Issues

Lisa Franklin, CEO, Warriors on Wheels of Metropolitan Detroit

CC: Chief Medical Executive Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian

Public Health Director Dr. Alexis Travis

Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities Director Allen Jansen

State Hospital Admin, Director Dr. George Mellos

Health & Aging Director Katherine Massey

Medical Services, Director Katherine Massey