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June 15, 2021

State of California
Governor's Office
Sacramento, CA

Dear Governor Newsom,

Many members of the California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) and the Health Officers Association of California (HOAC) have expressed grave concern at the prospect of COVID-19 vaccine wastage over the coming months. California currently has an oversupply of vaccines, with little realistic chance of using them before they expire. Close to 400,000 doses of vaccine currently sit in freezers while demand in the state remains low. We suspect that a similar situation exists in many other states.

We strongly support an effort to use these vaccines for the benefit of neighboring countries to our immediate south, who have less access to vaccine for COVID-19. These neighbors are struggling to achieve meaningful vaccination rates due to lack of supply. Mexico, for example, has less than 12% fully vaccinated among its population, and Honduras and Guatemala each have less than 1% fully vaccinated. While the logistics of cold chain storage in these countries are challenging they are not insurmountable. The simple step of allowing cross border vaccinations at existing sites in California would eliminate the need for special transportation and packaging. Perhaps through mutual aid agreements, highly experienced U.S. vaccination teams could cross the border and set up mass vaccination clinics in similar ways to what were done all throughout the state of California. We have the expertise as well as the vaccine to make this happen. What is lacking is the political will to allow use of these vaccines in this way.

Humanitarian effort of this scope can be politically charged, but there are more than humanitarian goals at play. We have an interest in promoting the health and welfare of many nations who are tied to us by business practices. The faster our neighboring nations can achieve vaccination to stop the spread of COVID-19, the faster the global economic recovery will take place and the more human lives we can save. In our country, we have already seen prices for common goods starting to rise in part due to slowed supply chain issues related to the pandemic outside our borders. Our national political and economic interests are tied to the health and welfare of many nations around the globe, and in the case of our nearest neighbors to the south, those ties are of even more critical importance.

We applaud the recent decision by the Biden administration to expand global export of vaccine. In addition to these moves, using the oversupply of short dated vaccines within our borders ought to be the first step of that effort. If these doses are not used it would represent a waste of taxpayer dollars since it is the American taxpayer who is paying for our vaccine supplies. Most Americans would take these common sense approaches to avoid wasting such valuable life-saving medications while continuing to see the pandemic unchecked in our neighboring countries. Furthermore, it is the core of our American values, responding to the needs of all global citizens.

We strongly urge our State and federal governments to make urgent changes to allow for such vaccine transfers and redistribution, as time is literally of the essence. Every dose of COVID-19 vaccine is a precious commodity and quick action needs to be taken now to ensure we do not waste what could save lives and the economies of our neighbors.

CCLHO was established in statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Health Services (now California Department of Public Health), other departments, boards, commissions, and officials of federal, state and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. CCLHO membership consists of all legally appointed physician health officers in California's 61 city and county jurisdictions.

We thank you for your continued partnership and collaboration with you about matters of importance to the state and local health officers. Should you have any questions, please contact me by email at karen.relucio@countyofnapa.org or by phone at (707) 253-4566.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Relucio', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Relucio, MD
President, California Conference of Local Health Officers

