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**OFFICE OF THE SUPERVISOR  
TOWN OF SOUTHOLD**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DATE:** January 14, 2021

**CONTACT:** Southold Town Supervisor Scott A. Russell

**RE:** COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Program

Supervisor Russell and Elected Officials have demanded action by New York State and Suffolk County to provide the residents of the East End access to vaccines and fix a process that is too slow and too chaotic.



THE ASSEMBLY  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
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FRED W. THIELE, JR.  
Assemblyman 1<sup>st</sup> District

CHAIR  
Committee on  
Local Governments

January 14, 2021

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Steven Bellone  
100 Veterans Memorial Highway  
Hauppauge, NY 11788

Dear Governor Cuomo and County Executive Bellone:

We write you today as the elected representatives of Suffolk County's five East End Towns and their Incorporated Villages with regard to the COVID-19 vaccine distribution program. We recognize the difficulties inherent in implementing such a massive endeavor. We also recognize that not all aspects of the vaccine distribution program are within your control.

The current problems with the vaccine program are well-chronicled in the Newsday editorial, "New York's Chaotic Vaccine Rollout", dated January 12, 2021, which we have attached to our letter.

We wish to focus your attention specifically on the East End of Long Island. The five East End towns have seen their population swell to summertime levels since the advent of the pandemic as residents have fled from urban areas to the safety of the more rural East End. We also note that our region pays 45% of the general fund property taxes to Suffolk County. We have been inundated with complaints from frustrated constituents about vaccine distribution and the lack of East End locations.

The vaccine distribution system on the East End, with the new, expanded eligibility categories is virtually non-existent. Our residents, particularly senior citizens, cannot be expected to drive an hour or more to places such as Brentwood, Jones Beach, or Stony Brook to get the vaccine. While we have submitted many locations in our communities for consideration for the distribution of the vaccine, those suggestions have been ignored.

We recognize that at this time, there is not enough vaccine available to meet the demand. However, when that vaccine becomes available, the East End must get its fair share. We want to be part of your solution. Our request is simple; work with us now to establish a network of distribution sites across the East End to provide for the convenient distribution of the vaccine to our mutual constituents, as it becomes available.

Time is of the essence. We await your response.

Sincerely,

Fred W. Thiele, Jr., NYS Assemblyman  
Anthony H. Palumbo, NYS Senator  
Jodi Giglio, NYS Assemblywoman  
Gerard F. Siller, Town of Shelter Island Supervisor  
Patrick Purcells, Village of Dering Harbor Mayor  
Scott Russell, Town of Southold Supervisor  
Jerry Larsen, Village of East Hampton Mayor  
Donald Louchheim, Village of Sagaponack Mayor  
Peter Sartorius, Village of Quogue Mayor  
Kathleen Mulcahy, Village of Sag Harbor Mayor  
Jeffrey Sander, Village of North Haven Mayor  
Dianne Skilbred, Village of North Haven Deputy Mayor  
Maria Z. Moore, Village of Westhampton Beach Mayor  
Gary Vegliante, Village of West Hampton Dunes Mayor  
Peter Van Scoyoc, Town of East Hampton Supervisor  
Jay Schneiderman, Town of Southampton Supervisor  
Yvette Aguiar, Town of Riverhead Supervisor

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# New York's chaotic vaccine rollout



New York State officials say they were prepared for the start of statewide vaccine appointments, but it's clear the state's system couldn't meet demand and the situation worsened on Tuesday. Credit: Howard Schnapp

By The Editorial Board January 12, 2021 6:59 PM

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Error messages and frozen computer screens. Hour-long waits on hold by phone only to be disconnected. Appointments made, only to be oddly canceled moments later. Pharmacies listed as ready-to-go, only to not even be scheduling vaccinations at all.

Have you tried to get an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine yet?

It's been a very rocky start. New York's efforts in scheduling people for their first vaccines have been a chaotic maze of frustrating, time-consuming and sometimes futile steps showing, yet again, the limits of the state's aging information technology infrastructure. Also at issue: the limited supply of doses that makes appointments difficult to get.

State officials say they were prepared for the start of statewide vaccine appointments, and that tens of thousands of people successfully booked appointments in the last two days. But it's clear the state's system couldn't meet the demand, and the situation worsened Tuesday, though officials correctly point out that the federal decision to broaden guidelines to include anyone 65 and older further taxed the system.

Nonetheless, the state has known a vaccine was coming — and that demand would be extensive — for months. State officials should have learned from the atrocious failure of the state Department of Labor's unemployment system last year. While they said they ramped up their systems and staffing, it clearly wasn't enough.

That's not to say this was going to be easy. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said Tuesday that the expansion of eligibility criteria meant that 7 million New Yorkers are eligible for the vaccine. But the state is still getting just 300,000 doses a week. If the pace were to stay as it is now, many older New Yorkers would be unable to get an appointment until the summer. That's an unacceptable scenario and it's imperative that federal officials pick up the pace, if not now, then as soon as President-elect Joe Biden takes office next week.

But New York has to be better prepared for this constantly changing situation and that means finding ways around the often Byzantine way of doing things so common in Albany. It means enlisting outside experts or considering public-private partnerships with entities that understand supply chains or the scheduling and programming of large events. It means increasing staff and capacity. And it means communicating with local governments and with residents, so county officials can better plan for appointments at the sites they're running, and so everyone knows what to expect.

It was essential that the state's efforts start smoothly, particularly to instill confidence and get us past this crisis and back to some normalcy. Eligible

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New Yorkers have to be patient, and should only show up if they have an appointment. State officials, meanwhile, must match their hope that kinks will be worked out in the coming days with the effort to make that happen, even as some appointments may be months away.

The demand is only going to increase, especially once the vaccine opens to more of the public. The state must learn from its early mistakes and be ready.

— *The editorial board*

**By The Editorial Board**

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