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Congress of the United States
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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION
IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

January 25, 2021

Governor Bill Lee
Tennessee State Capitol, 1st Floor
600 Dr. Martin L. King Jr. Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee:

I write today to express my urgent concerns regarding COVID-19 vaccine access in Shelby County. I have heard from constituents, reviewed the data and am unable to reconcile the state's vaccine distribution formula with publicly available information.

As you know, Black Americans are dying from COVID-19 at disproportionately high rates. Of the 1,169 Memphians who have died thus far, 673 were Black.¹ It is unconscionable that Shelby County is the county which, by the state's own calculations, has the lowest percentage of its population vaccinated.²

Shelby County has acted in good faith throughout this public health crisis and has taken the appropriate steps to issue stay-at-home orders and mask mandates despite the state's reticence to issue state-wide guidance. Yet recent news reports indicate that the county is last when it comes to vaccination rates.³ These reports contradict your Administration's announced policy of giving inner-city neighborhoods and rural areas an additional 5 percent increase in vaccine allocations.

¹ COVID-19 Resource Center. Race Demographics. <https://insight.livestories.com/s/v2/covid-19-data-dashboard-%7C-shelby-county-tn/e381a899-7ffe-43fe-b80f-c9e63ebfcef6>.

² Tennessee COVID-19 Vaccination Reporting. Tennessee Department of Health. https://data.tn.gov/t/Public/views/TennIISCOVID-19VaccineReporting/1STD0SE?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3Atoolbar=no&%3Aembed=yes.

³ "Memphis as Usual: Shelby vaccination rate lower than most every other county in Tenn." *Memphis Business Journal*. <https://www.bizjournals.com/memphis/news/2021/01/22/memphis-as-usual-vaccinations-tennessee.html>.

Though President Biden has directed the Department of Health and Human Services to release guidelines for redistribution within states to ensure that jurisdictions are following all appropriate science-based guidance, it is my hope that Tennessee will act proactively to protect its citizens and rectify this issue immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Cc: Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris, Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland and Shelby County Health Department Director Alisa Haushalter