

Lawrence bill to expedite COVID vaccine effort

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Legislation sponsored by state Rep. John Lawrence, R-13th, of Franklin, to expedite Pennsylvania's COVID-19 vaccine rollout passed the state House with broad bipartisan support on Wednesday.

"This bill accelerates Pennsylvania's COVID-19 vaccine distribution effort and brings us into compliance with federal vaccination guidelines," said Lawrence. "It also ensures our county health departments, which have spent decades planning for this kind of emergency, will oversee mass vaccination efforts for our community."

Frustrated by the Pennsylvania Health Department's troubled rollout of the vaccine program that shortchanged residents of several counties in southeast Pennsylvania, and after receiving hundreds of calls from constituents concerned about waiting lists, canceled appointments, and the general inability to get a vaccine, Lawrence authored House Bill 63 to reorganize the state's COVID-19 vaccination effort.

As amended, House Bill 63 directs the Department of Health to engage county health departments and directly provide them with increased supplies of vaccines. The bill also provides county health departments, not state bureaucrats, with oversight over mass-vaccination sites. The bill further provides additional medical professionals authority to administer COVID-19 vaccinations in line with recent federal guidance, and requires the state to implement transparency, reporting, and accountability measures regarding how federally provided vaccines are distributed by the state.

Recent press reports, including coverage from 6ABC Action News and the Philadelphia Inquirer, show Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties received far fewer doses on a per-capita basis than the rest of the state. With that in mind, House Bill 63 also requires state officials to identify why counties in southeastern Pennsylvania received disproportionately fewer vaccines than other parts of the state, and identify how the state will make up the difference.

"I'm grateful to my colleagues for their bipartisan support of House Bill 63," said Lawrence. "This legislation provides a roadmap to rapidly scale-up the vaccination effort in Chester County and across the state. We need to get this done as soon as possible; folks have waited long enough."

House Bill 63 passed the House by a 135-66 veto-proof majority. It now goes to the Senate for consideration.

