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November 24, 2021

Jeff Zients
White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Zients-

I write to you today regarding the Biden Administration's recent purchase of 10 million treatment courses of Pfizer's COVID-19 antiviral drug, Paxlovid.¹ The anticipated approval of this drug, along with that of molnupiravir, a similar antiviral treatment developed by Merck, is undoubtedly a hopeful step forward in ending the COVID-19 pandemic, and I urge the Administration to quickly issue additional information and guidance to pharmacies on how they can access the federal supply of these antiviral treatments. I would also urge the Administration to take steps to ensure the network of entities that can distribute these products is as broad as possible, including independent, community-based pharmacies.

Independent pharmacies are often locally owned small businesses that are trusted providers in their communities. In many places, they may be the only pharmacy available. Last month, I sent a letter to Secretary Becerra outlining my concerns that independent pharmacies have not been able to take full advantage of the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) pharmacy program to provide free COVID-19 testing during this pandemic. Because independent pharmacies often lack the financial resources to cover the costs associated with testing themselves, difficulties with participating in the HHS pharmacy program mean that they must charge for testing. This reduces access to testing in many areas that need it.

As the Administration works to contract with pharmacies to receive and distribute doses of Paxlovid and molnupiravir, I am concerned that independent pharmacies will once again be left behind. In clinical trials, these treatments have been shown to be remarkably effective in preventing hospitalization and death due to COVID-19. As COVID-19 test positivity rates increase and cases and hospitalizations once again begin to rise across the country in advance of this holiday season, this treatment represents a valuable tool in our expanding arsenal to save lives and end this pandemic. We must make sure that it is made available and is accessible to those who need it regardless of the type of pharmacy they have in their community. I therefore

¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/11/18/biden-administration-secures-10-million-courses-pfizers-covid-19-oral-antiviral-medicine-as-additional-tool-reduce-hospitalizations-save-lives.html>

urge you and the Administration to take deliberate steps to include independent pharmacies in your efforts to distribute the federal supply of these antiviral treatments.

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress