

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 28, 2021

The Honorable Robert J. Fenton Jr.  
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)  
500 C Street, SW, Room 8 SW  
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Acting Administrator Fenton,

COVID-19 has ravaged cities across the U.S., including border communities like El Paso. However, there is now a light at the end of the tunnel because of the recent approval of vaccines and I am proud that El Paso is leading the way in Texas when it comes to immunizations. That is why I am writing to request that El Paso region be considered for a community vaccination site.

El Paso continues to be extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. Dr. Anthony Fauci and others have said time and time again that minority communities like El Paso are disproportionately impacted by this virus. Latinos have been shown to suffer from this disproportionate impact because they tend to be essential workers and hold jobs that do not allow them to work from home. Underlying health conditions coupled with socioeconomic challenges like a lack of access to healthcare has made the pandemic that much worse for Latinos. The havoc this pandemic has caused for Latinos has led experts like Dr. Peter Hotez to call what we are seeing in Latino communities a, “historic decimation of the Hispanic community by the virus.” El Paso has been subjected to a perfect storm and the only way through it is to continue to push vaccines out to our community.

Even though we endured one of the worst outbreaks in the country, El Pasoans are resilient. That is why local providers have stepped up to put together the infrastructure needed to conduct and maintain an effective vaccine rollout. Providers like the City of El Paso and University Medical Center, El Paso, which currently serve as our local mega-sites, have helped El Paso achieve an 87% efficiency rate when it comes to vaccinations. This is the highest efficiency rate in Texas by county at the moment and is one of the reasons El Paso County could soon be the first urban Texas county to have at least 10% of our population over the age of 16 vaccinated with at least the initial dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>1</sup> El Pasoans have also shown an eagerness to receive the vaccine, with over 160,000 preregistered for appointments through the City alone.

As vaccine supplies increase, a community vaccination site in El Paso would not only be able to serve El Pasoans, but also individuals living throughout the borderland region from southern New Mexico to other parts of Far West Texas. El Paso acts as a central hub for borderland residents and installing a central community vaccination site to supplement the vaccine

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<sup>1</sup> <https://elpasomatters.org/2021/01/24/el-paso-will-be-first-big-county-in-texas-to-reach-important-covid-19-vaccine-milestone/>

administration programs of surrounding counties will help bring cases down across the region. Additionally, this vaccination site can act as the staging ground for mobile vaccination clinics that can be deployed to colonias, which are unincorporated residential areas along the U.S.-Mexico border that continue to lack access to basic necessities like paved roads, broadband access, potable water, and wastewater treatment systems. My district has over 300 of these communities alone with even more scattered across the southern border states. Colonia residents are routinely underserved and it would be beneficial to bring the vaccine to these neighborhoods to ensure they have the opportunity to receive it.

Finally, even as vaccines become more widely available in the U.S., it is important for us to engage with Mexico to develop a binational COVID-19 plan. Last Congress, I introduced the Binational Health Strategies Act to develop such a plan to protect border communities like ours against COVID-19. I also spoke with members of the President's team during the transition period about the importance of a binational strategy and wrote a letter to President Biden's COVID-19 Czar, Jeffrey Zients. Putting a community vaccination site in El Paso could begin to alleviate cases on both sides of the border and I continue to urge President Biden to work with Mexico to create a binational COVID-19 plan.

El Paso has shown that it has the capacity and demand to host a vaccination site. With President Biden recently raising his national vaccination rate goal to 1.5 million per day, El Paso stands ready to work with the Biden Administration to help make this goal a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronica Escobar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress