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February 14, 2021

The Honorable Weston Newton  
228 Blatt Building  
Columbia, SC 29201

*RE: House Legislative Oversight Ad Hoc Committee*

Chairman Newton:

Thank you for the opportunity on January 21, 2021 to provide testimony regarding the receipt and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines by the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). Since that time, the South Carolina Medical Association (SCMA) has continued to hear from physicians who would like to provide the vaccine at their independent practices.

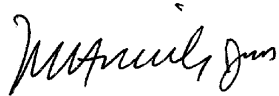
Physicians understand the limited supply of the vaccine, the difficulty of separating Pfizer doses, and the constraints of cold storage. However, they feel strongly that they can encourage patients who may not otherwise get vaccinated to do so and to provide that vaccination. Older patients have questions on whether they should take the vaccines and physicians are counseling patients without the ability to treat them or sign them up for vaccination. Likewise, even pediatricians want to assist in vaccinating family members of children, especially when they have at-risk children who need to have protected adults in their circle. Understandably allocation is a difficult issue, and mass vaccination sites are important to move the vaccine quickly. But we encourage the General Assembly to consider the value of small practices to get those vaccinated who might otherwise choose not to be vaccinated or who do not have the means to travel to a vaccination site as supply becomes available. Physician-patient relationships and regular office visits have always been part of combatting a public health crisis.

In addition, many physician offices have registered so that when vaccine is more readily available, they can provide the vaccine, even if limited to Moderna or newly available vaccines. DHEC has accepted these physician offices to receive and administer the vaccine but have not activated the sites due to the supply constraints. When activated, these physician offices will need to be trained on ordering the vaccine and how to utilize DHEC's systems, and they may need additional staff to host vaccination clinics. These pieces of information should be made available now so when the vaccine does become available these practices can be activated at a moment's notice. More communication from DHEC to registered and accepted physician offices would alleviate questions and fears that physician offices will not receive any vaccine or will not be ready at the appropriate time. For example, if DHEC knows that it is unlikely there will be additional

supplies before March, an email communication that there is limited supply and DHEC will reevaluate the availability again in March would provide practices with information. Without some follow up information, practices and their patients sit in limbo with many questions as to the timing when they might receive vaccine.

The SCMA knows that ultimately vaccinating a state is not a sprint, but a marathon. Accordingly, making sure that the right pieces are in place to continue vaccinations through 2021 and longer is important. Richele Taylor our General Counsel is working with DHEC, the South Carolina Hospital Association, pharmacists, and others to try and increase the flow of information between all of the groups. On behalf of the SCMA, we appreciate the House looking at these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael T. Finch, Jr.", written in black ink.

Michael T. Finch, Jr., MD  
President