A RESOLUTION

Urging the Department of Health to prioritize the vaccination of corrections staff and incarcerated people since they are at increased risk for contracting and dying from COVID-19.

WHEREAS, Incarcerated people have suffered high rates of COVID-19 infection because of the nature of close confinement with others and some serious failings of the enactment of health and safety guidelines; and

WHEREAS, The mortality rate of COVID-19 for incarcerated people in Federal and state correctional facilities is four times as high as the mortality rate for the general population; and

WHEREAS, Over the course of the pandemic, more than 12,000 inmates in Pennsylvania have tested positive for COVID-19 and 76 have died; and

WHEREAS, Over half of the inmates at the State Correctional Institute Laurel Highlands, which serves as a long-term care facility for many older inmates or inmates with medical conditions, have tested positive for COVID-19 and at least eight
people have died; and

WHEREAS, Corrections staff are put at increased risk for contracting and dying from COVID-19 because of their exposure to increased rates of COVID-19 at prisons and other correctional facilities; and

WHEREAS, Outbreaks in prisons that infect corrections staff can spread to the surrounding community; and

WHEREAS, Given that many correctional institutions in Pennsylvania are located in rural areas, outbreaks that start at correctional institutions and spread to the surrounding community through corrections staff can strain the capabilities and resources of rural hospitals that have a limited capacity because of the high number of existing COVID-19 cases; and

WHEREAS, While several thousand people have been released from correctional institutions to slow the spread of COVID-19 in correctional institutions in Pennsylvania, this effort was not sufficient to stop the virus and it continues to spread rapidly; and

WHEREAS, As of January 11, 2021, there are 2,163 active COVID-19 cases among inmates in Pennsylvania and 251 cases among staff; and

WHEREAS, The development and emergency use authorizations of COVID-19 vaccines is an important milestone, and the needs of incarcerated people cannot be forgotten; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives urge the Department of Health to prioritize the vaccination of corrections staff and incarcerated people since they are at increased risk for contracting and dying from COVID-19.