



# NATIONAL GRANGE

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*American Values. Hometown Roots.*

December 14, 2021

Representative Peter Welch  
2187 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Welch,

The National Grange is writing today to express support for H.R. 1978, *Protecting Seniors Through Immunization Act of 2021*, which will remove financial barriers to vaccination for America's seniors. Since our founding in 1867, the National Grange has worked with administrations of both parties to advance policies that support rural America. Today, the National Grange serves as the national voice of over 150,000 rural Americans from across the country. In this mission, we hope to bring awareness to issues that support the economic and physical well-being of rural and agriculture communities.

Vaccines are critical to rural and agriculture communities for several reasons, including the demographics of those communities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 46 million Americans living in rural communities and nearly 10.6 million are 65 years or older.<sup>1</sup> Seniors also play a critical role in the agriculture community, as 36% of principal farm operators are 65 years or older.<sup>2</sup>

Avoiding preventable infectious disease is critical in rural communities because of the already challenged state of health care in many of those communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges. According to study by the consulting firm McKinsey, people living in rural areas are more likely to die from COVID-19, more likely to suffer conditions that make them high-risk and more likely to be food insecure, among other health challenges.<sup>3</sup>

One of the best and most cost-effective ways to protect our nation's seniors is to ensure they are vaccinated against COVID-19 and other common infectious diseases. Vaccines are a preventive measure that deliver excellent economic value. Vaccines also go through a stringent safety

<sup>1</sup> "The Older Population in Rural America: 2012–2016." U.S. Census Bureau, Sept. 2019, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/acs/acs-41.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "America's Diverse Family Farms: 2017 Edition." U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dec. 2017.

<sup>3</sup> "COVID-19 and rural communities: Protecting rural lives and health." McKinsey, 10 March, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/covid-19-and-rural-communities-protecting-rural-lives-and-health>

review via the FDA and a further review by the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) which develops a recommendation for their use. During these unprecedented times, the most important thing we can do to help ensure seniors get vaccinated is to remove financial barriers to vaccination.

Unfortunately, the way Medicare is currently structured puts some vaccines out of reach for many seniors. In Medicare, vaccines are paid for through two programs, Part B and Part D. In Part B, vaccines are available at no cost to seniors. Congress specifically ensured that COVID-19 vaccines would be placed in Part B so that seniors would not have to pay to get vaccinated. However, for vaccines covered under Part D, people with Medicare may have to pay significant and varying out-of-pocket costs before receiving their vaccines. The data tells us that the more seniors must pay, the less likely they are to get vaccinated.

Fortunately, there is a common-sense, bi-partisan solution.

We commend Representatives Kuster (D-NH) and Buschon (R-IN) and the more than forty other members of the House of Representatives who have co-sponsored The Protecting Seniors Through Immunizations Act. This legislation would ensure that all ACIP-recommended vaccines would be available without cost-sharing for those with Medicare. This common-sense and cost-effective proposal would go a long way toward ensuring that seniors have access to the vaccines that America's public health authorities believe they need.

As we continue to battle the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress should leverage every tool available to protect our nation's older adults. With your support of this legislation, our most vulnerable citizens can have the benefit of vaccines that have been proven to dramatically reduce the risk and mortality of vulnerable seniors.

Respectfully,



Betsy Huber  
President  
National Grange