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Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: December 30th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you for being with us virtually today. Today marks the 144th and final time that we will be together in this forum this year. Thinking back to March, none of us could have imagined what the year 2020 became, and as we leave it behind, and I can say overwhelmingly gladly so, we know that 2021 will be better.

I'm joined as I usually am by the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. Another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. Another very familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan, but we also have two special guests today, Congressman and Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee Frank Pallone, my Congressman and dear friend, and the State's Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner, great to have him back, Rob Asaro Angelo.

With all that's going on in Washington and from his position at the highest reaches of the House leadership, I know Frank can give us a solid update on where things stand currently, and what we may be able to expect in the coming weeks and months. And on a point of personal privilege, I want to thank Frank for his steadfast support for New Jersey's families throughout this pandemic and for all that he's done in so many other areas as well, especially in his leadership on things like the environment, infrastructure and other matters. We are so lucky to have him representing us and fighting for us in Washington.

And from the state's perspective, Robert Asaro Angelo and his team have done tremendous work over the past nine-plus months to provide unemployment benefits to well more than 1.5 million New Jersey workers. With the enactment of this newest round of Coronavirus relief, Rob and his team are currently working to

[back to top](#)

implement the federal \$300 per week supplemental UI benefit it contains, and I've asked Rob to join us to give us a full update on those efforts.

Now moving on, we have another couple of announcements to make. First, as we announced late yesterday, the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, an incredible colleague, Carol Johnson will be leaving our administration next month to join the incoming federal administration as testing coordinator in President-Elect Biden's White House COVID response team. This is a great picture of the day Carol was sworn in. I remember like it were yesterday with her husband Jim holding the Bible and with her mom and dad looking on with great pride. Carol has been a tremendous member of our team since day one – literally, by the way – and has done tremendous work heading up the Department of Human Services, arguably one of the toughest portfolios in state government. She will be a tremendous asset to the new administration, to COVID Czar Jeff Zients, who we've been on with regularly to the President-Elect, Vice President-Elect and their colleagues, and she'll be a huge asset to the nationwide fight against COVID. Carol's last day with us will be January 15th, at which time Deputy Commissioner Sarah Edelman will become Acting Commissioner. Sarah and I spoke yesterday. She is another star and I think one of Carol's hallmarks was the bench that she built. So it is with a bittersweet, heavy heart on the one hand that we lose Carol, but she has left a great team behind and she will be a huge asset in our national fight against COVID.

Next up, as it pertains to the continued rollout of our vaccination program, we have set up a new page at our COVID-19 information hub specifically for vaccine information. The page is, you can see it right there at the bottom, covid19.nj.gov/vaccine. This is our central online location for official vaccine-related information and will also serve as a landing page for our vaccine registration portal in the near future.

I'm also pleased that our federal pharmacy partners were in the Paramus Veterans Memorial Home on Monday to vaccinate the residents and staff there. Residents and staff at the Vineland Veterans Memorial Home, by the way, which is currently being clobbered by this virus after having been largely spared in the spring and summer, they will receive their vaccinations on Friday, this Friday, January 1st, and those blessed veterans in the Menlo Park Veterans Memorial Home are scheduled for next Tuesday, January 5th.

Our veterans are especially honored part of our New Jersey family and they have paid an enormous toll in this pandemic. I'm pleased that by this time next week, the residents and staff at each of the three veterans homes will have received their first vaccinations.

Also on our vaccination program, and I think from time to time we will lift up organizations that do the right thing and do it as expeditiously and as carefully as this team did. We received this update yesterday, I want to thank Assemblyman Antwan McClellan for bringing it to our attention from the Complete Care Health Network, which completed its first vaccination session yesterday in Bridgeton, with employees who have been central to Complete Care's COVID testing efforts invited to receive their first doses. Additional staff will be receiving their first vaccinations across the remainder of this week. So to the entire team at Complete Care, we give you a tip of our cap and our encouragement to keep going.

Next up, switching gears again, I know that a lot of people have been waiting for this one, we have an update on our indoor sports. We are allowing the indoor sports pause, which we implemented on December 5th, to expire this Saturday, January 2nd, and for indoor sports to resume that day. So given the safety protocols that we have in place and the stability in our numbers over the past months, although stability at an uncomfortably high level, I have to say, we feel confident we can move forward by continuing to deal with any outbreaks or other issues on an individual case basis, as opposed to a blanket prohibition. Further, we recognize that any continuance of the pause would likely mean that many sports seasons would have to be scrapped entirely and we do not wish to see that happen. We know that sports are important for both the physical and mental wellness of our youth and our other residents. We will continue to closely watch the outbreak data and reserve the right to pull this back if we must.

I have to say, you know, we thought about okay, what if we extended this from January 2 to January 9, or January 16? And frankly, we did not have any conviction and Judy should weigh in here at some point as well, if she wants to, we did not have any conviction that the numbers would be showing us a particularly different look at that point that would lead us to a different conclusion. So as long as folks play it straight, they play it right, they do the right things, we're open for business again on January 2nd for indoor sports.

However, as we allow indoor sports to resume, all interstate youth sports competitions will continue to be prohibited. The prior exceptions for collegiate and professional sports teams remain. We know that interstate travel and associated activities among teams are particularly risky, as the settings create opportunities for the virus to spread. We continue to work with our colleagues in Maine, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut and Massachusetts to maintain the regional compact prohibiting interstate youth hockey that we announced on November 12th. If we have updates there, we'll come back to you.

Before we go to the next slide, Mahen is directing us to today, I want to make sure that we say the following. Our indoor limits are 10 persons and fewer, period. But if you need more than 10 folks to actually play the game, between the teams, the coach, the referees, you could go above that, but only for those individuals. There could be no – if you're above 10, there is to be no spectators, period. And I that brings me no joy to say that but that's the way it's got to be. If, for whatever reason, the number of people required to compete is below 10, including coaches, players, refs, for instance, I could see a one-on-one tennis match would be an example this, you can have folks as long as they're socially distanced, they're wearing face coverings, to observe up to a total of 10, including the participants. We're going to be watching this, we have to watch it and all options remain on the table.

Finally, unrelated but importantly, we are extending the deadline for eligible homeowners ages 65 and older to apply for the senior freeze property tax relief program. The deadline was to be tomorrow, December 31st but we're going to push that out to Monday, February 1, 2021. For more information on the senior freeze, including eligibility requirements, please visit that website nj.gov/treasury.

Let's turn with that to the overnight numbers. Today we are reporting an additional 4,664 positive PCR test results. That's a statewide cumulative total since March 4th of 472,264. The positivity for all 22,823 PCR tests recorded on December 26th was 15.19%.

Before we go on, Judy made a good point to us this morning as a group, the chances if you're getting tested on Christmas Day when the spot positivity, by the way, was 14.46%. or on Saturday, December 26th, so-called Boxing Day, the chances are probably higher than normal that you've got symptoms, that you're going out volitionally, getting tested on those days so we want to see these numbers as they shake out over the next four days.

Statewide rate of transmission is currently at 0.95. In our healthcare system, as of last night's reports, and again, these are the numbers we cannot allow our state to be overrun on, there's a total of 3,727 patients being treated across our 71 hospitals. Of those, 3,523 are known COVID positives. 204 are so-called persons under investigation, awaiting confirmation of their test results. Good news is through Tuesday, 24 hours, 437 live patients walked out of our hospitals. Another 428 unfortunately, were admitted.

And again, at the risk of comparing apples to oranges because these are not confirmed fatalities, but 66 in-hospital deaths yesterday. There were 701 patients of that total of 3,727, of that number, 701 were in our intensive care units as of 10:00 p.m. last night; 467 of them were on ventilators.

Sadly with the heaviest of hearts, we must report another 99 confirmed losses of life from our extraordinary New Jersey family from COVID-19. That gives us a statewide cumulative total since March 10th, which was the date of our first confirmed death, of 16,931. And the number of probable deaths and we expected this and previewed this, has been revised upward to 2,021.

So in 10 months, this virus has cut a deep scar across countless families, entire communities, and indeed our entire state. The scale of infection and death in 2020 that it would bring is not anything any of us could have imagined at this time a year ago. We have fought this virus, folks, together; we have embraced new practices, we have battled through this pandemic and we're currently battling pandemic fatigue together. We've worked hard to protect our families and friends and to save lives. We know that 2021 will bring better days, but we're going to have to greet the new year on the same war footing with which we're ending 2020. I wish there was magic on Friday. It's going to be better. The year 2021 unquestionably will be better but it will not be on day one or even in the first days, weeks or months. The new year brings with it hope and optimism from the vaccine program that is expanding every day. But look at the numbers, all of them. We can't consider ourselves done with this virus, because this virus unfortunately is not done with us. Let's keep fighting. And if we all do our jobs, we will make 2021 so much better than our 2020.

And with that, let's take a couple of minutes and honor for the last time this year, I have to say, three more of those we have lost from our blessed New Jersey family. We want to begin today by remembering 33-year Brick Township resident Walter Rushalski. Walter was a real estate appraiser and he also served with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for 16 years, bringing his expertise to the Tidelands Management and the Blue Acres Program specifically. Walter was a man of faith, a member of the Epiphany Roman Catholic Church in Brick and a coordinator of its interfaith hospitality network. He also took great pleasure in the arts, especially music, living by the motto that "music is the emotion of life."

Walter's family was his priority, and he leaves behind his beloved wife Maureen, his son Brian, his two daughters Lauren and Jennifer, and I had the great honor of speaking with Maureen, Lauren and Jennifer. Brian wanted to be there but had to work. And Jennifer's fiancé, his future son-in-law Douglas. Walter was only 60 years old when he passed 12 days ago. Walter's family and friends will never forget his good humor and his ability to make others laugh. They'll miss his company on dinners out, on restorative walks along the beach, and on vacations and other adventures. And I said to Maureen, the name of my late brother and my late dad is Walter, so this one has a special place in my heart personally. We will miss, all of us, his presence in our New Jersey family. We thank Walter for his years of service to the state of New Jersey, and his lifetime commitment to his faith and family, and may God bless and watch over him, his memory and his family.

Next up, we honor Michael Reilly of Toms River. Michael was only 47 years old when COVID took him on December 9th. He was born in Morris County but called the Toms River area home for most of his life. Michael was a proud member of the United States Marine Corps as a veteran, where he had trained as a firefighter. Following his service, he owned and operated the Servpro franchise in Toms River. In the early days of the pandemic, it was his business that took on the task, and Pat Callahan will appreciate this, of cleaning and sanitizing the Township's police vehicles and offices. As a business owner, he was an active member of Ocean County Business Association, and lent his support to numerous local charitable organizations and events. He was also a huge fan of both the New York Yankees and the New York football Giants. He will be rooting for the Giants at one o'clock on Sunday to beat the Cowboys and assuming Washington loses on Sunday night and probably find their way into the playoffs and Michael would be thrilled with that.

Michael leaves behind his wife of 10 years Rebecca, who you can see on the left, and his two blessed kids, eight-year-old Leah on the right and four-year-old Michael II. He also leaves his sisters Janice and Marian, his brother John and his twin brother, Patrick. Michael was predeceased by his parents, but is also survived by his aunt and uncle Carol and Butch. We thank Michael for his service to our nation and his community. May God bless and watch over him and may young Leah and Michael grow to emulate their father's selflessness and spirit. Rebecca wanted me to say, and folks need to hear this, that Michael was lost at the age of 47 with absolutely no underlying conditions. This can happen, folks, to any of us and tragically it happened to Michael Reilly.

Finally for today, we remember this guy with that smile, Eduardo Lluberes. He was born and raised in the Dominican Republic and proudly called Jersey City, New Jersey his home. For nearly 15 years, Eduardo served NJ Transit commuters as a bus operator. He was a member of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 821, a local I know well, based out of the Greenville garage in his hometown. Eduardo passed away only last week on December 22nd. Again, at the age folks, of just 49 years old. He leaves behind his two sons, Josias and Niamias, ages 22 and 17 respectively. He also leaves behind his brother Juan, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, his sister and his mom. He also leaves behind the NJ Transit colleagues that he called his family and the ATU family, and he leaves an empty space in our proud Dominican community.

Like so many before him, Eduardo came to New Jersey in search of his American dream. We're honored that he chose to be a part of our family. May God bless and watch over him, his memory, his family, especially his two sons. If you want to help two kids out this holiday season, they could use it, and I'm ATU Local 821 will let you know exactly how you can do that.

We began celebrating the lives of those lost to COVID-19 on March 30th, nine months literally ago today. We began doing so for a couple of reasons and you've heard this from us, but not in a while. First, we wanted to make sure that as much as data and facts and science matter, and they do and they drive our decisions, that

at the same time, none of these folks we lost could ever become mere statistics. They are the faces of New Jersey, in all of our great diversity. They are worth seeing and remembering. They are lives, individual lives lived and lost, with families left behind.

We also began doing this because we knew that this pandemic had forced many families to change the ways in which they honor and memorialize their loved ones. In the spring, and frankly, into the early to mid-summer, many families simply couldn't hold funerals. Now, many families are holding smaller ones to help protect against the further spread of the virus. I can't tell you how many folks I heard from, we had the "three strikes, you're out" reality. We lost a loved one, we couldn't see them in the hospital at the end of their life, and we couldn't give them a proper send off after they were lost. But by remembering those we have lost, I hope that we've been able to help these families achieve a measure of closure, and not just for the specific families who we have memorialized but as a statement, not just for them but on behalf of the other thousands of families who we would like to memorialize.

With Walter, Michael and Eduardo today, over the past nine months we have remembered 404 of our fellow New Jerseyans who we have lost. But again, that's out of a total of 16,931 confirmed and likely over 2,000 more we have lost to COVID. That's just a small percentage of all those we have lost, but they also represent the whole, as I mentioned. It is their stories, yes, but their stories are mirrored in the stories of countless thousands of others. Whether we spoke about them or whether I spoke, as I have to each one of these 404 families, or to the thousands more that they represent, we remember every single one of them we have lost this year and the families they have left behind. May God bless and watch over every single one of those we have lost and again, the families that they leave behind.

We've also used our platform here to highlight a few of the nearly 55,000 small businesses and community nonprofit organizations who have been supported by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority throughout this pandemic, and the economic emergency it created. The EDA has stepped forward with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of direct grants and loans with new capital guarantees for startups and with many other innovative programs which we have spoken about lately. Their Sustain and Serve NJ program to support our restaurant industry, to keep Main Street, New Jersey working.

Today we're recognizing one of the key institutions in Central Jersey, Rise, which has provided essential supports for families in Hightstown and East Windsor since 1967. Rise offers multiple support services, but one of the ones that has been the most impactful over the course of 2020 has been the Rise Pantry, which has seen a 300% increase in the number of families requiring assistance. Roughly 325 families per week are turning to Rise to help them put healthy food on their tables. Rise has also teamed up with other regional programs like the Trenton area soup kitchen to help meet the needs of thousands more families.

To keep up the tremendous increase in the demand for its services, Rise worked with the EDA to receive two separate grants, which supplemented increased individual and corporate giving and generous support for the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund, and they're doing great work, NJPRF.org, look them up. With these funds, Rise has been able to triple food storage capacity at the Rise Pantry, to get additional grocery carts for their clients, and to purchase a used refrigerated truck and rent forklifts and pallet jacks to keep essential goods moving.

I had the opportunity to check in with Rise's executive director on Monday, my good friend I have to say, Monroe townships very own Leslie Koppel, you can see Leslie's smiling face. By the way, Leslie keeps a few balls of the air. She also serves as a Middlesex County Freeholder, about to be Commissioner. I thank Leslie and her entire team at Rise for all they've done and continue doing to support the families in their area. I know she shares our optimism that 2021 will bring better days for us all.

Rise, by the way is the 61st EDA partner that we have recognized since we began shouting out our small businesses and community organizations on July 2nd. And as I noted, that is a fraction of the group that the EDA has helped, nearly 55,000 other small businesses and organizations statewide. Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan and his team, including the EDA's extraordinary board, both the team and the board are extraordinary. The board is led by Chairman Kevin Quinn. They've done tremendous things with the resources at their disposal. And because of them, our economy is poised and ready for growth in the upcoming year on the back of a, please God, far better public health reality in the spring.

That's a good note on which to end. 2021 will bring better days. But for us to reach them, we're going to have to maintain all we've done throughout 2020: social distancing, wearing our masks, washing our hands, using our common sense. So on behalf of my family, and me, I wish you and your families a happy and healthy New Year. Let's celebrate the end of 2020, folks, responsibly. Small ball so we can all celebrate the better days to come.

One final note for this year. We also owe a quick thanks to the folks who you've seen on screen with Judy and Pat and me throughout these 144 briefings. The folks providing American Sign Language interpretation for the deaf and hard of hearing. They're as much a part of our team as anyone else. So today, I want to give a shout out on the upper left right now to Eileen Forrestal, and she's going to be joined by Kathy Faraja, and they are with us interpreting today. But I also want to give a shout out to their colleagues Noah Buckles, Ronnie Laporte, Rachel Owens, Steve Tov, April Ritchie, and Pat Philipovitz. Thank you to each and every one of you for all you do.

With that, I want to turn things over to an extraordinary fighter on behalf of New Jersey's interests. There's none better. He's among the most senior members of Congress. He's the Dean of our Democratic delegation. I want to give a big shout out to my Congressman, our friend, our fighter, Congressman and Chairman Frank Pallone.

Congressman Frank Pallone: Thank you, Governor. Let me first thank you and also Tammy, as well, for constantly reminding us about how we have to look at this on a personal level. I know when you mentioned the people who passed away and you mentioned Leslie Koppel and others who work every day, you know, one of the best things about you and Tammy is that you constantly, you don't just look at data, you don't just look at this in a macro sense, you look at how everything affects the individual. I appreciate that and I know everybody does. I do have to say, you know, you remind me today that I woke up this morning and read about a Congressman-Elect from Louisiana, I didn't even know him, his name is Luke Letlow who was going to be sworn in this Sunday from Louisiana and who unfortunately passed away from COVID. Only 41, with young children as well. It's just another reminder of how this affects everyone. It doesn't matter how young or old you are, and the seriousness of this pandemic in this crisis.

But let me also thank you and Colonel Callahan and Commissioner Judy. One of the things that I have to tell the media here, because I haven't had the opportunity as yet, and I've been in office as a Congressman for 32 years going back to Governor Kaine, and I'm not trying to take away from anybody else. But you have just been, and your Cabinet, have just worked with the Congressional delegation and been so transparent. And anytime we had a problem with constituents or had questions, you were always there. That's been a hallmark of your administration. I want to thank the Commissioner and the Colonel as well, because that has been the case from day one during this COVID crisis.

I wanted to talk about this latest package as briefly as I can, that addressed the COVID crisis that was signed by the President, I guess, on Sunday, but I don't want to be too much of a bureaucrat. I want you to understand, I'm just focusing on the COVID part of this because this was married, as many of you know, with the budget, with the annual appropriation bill. So there were a lot of good things in this that I'm not going to talk about today, like getting rid of surprise billing, having major down payment on addressing the climate crisis by phasing out HFCs and so many other things like that, but I'm going to focus on COVID.

I do want you to understand that I see this bill as a down payment. I am not going to oversell this bill. If I could speak for all the Democrats in our delegation, we obviously thought the number should be much higher overall. We wanted \$600 instead of \$300 for unemployment. We're still trying to get \$2,000 for direct cash payments instead of the \$600. And probably most important, we wanted to have money for direct state and local aid, for the state and our towns. We understand that this is very insufficient in the sense that that money for the state and the towns is not there. And so when I say, you know, I don't want to oversell this, I want you to understand, you know, we're looking forward to this new administration under Joe Biden. We fully expect that we can do a lot more, particularly with regard to the state and local aid.

But the bottom line is we were able to get this done, we were able to get it at the end of the year and it's very important. I'm going to focus just on the things that relate to healthcare and a few other things directly. When we started out, remember, this bill came from this bipartisan Senate group, it only had \$17 billion for the

vaccine, for testing and contact tracing, we thought that was woefully inadequate and we managed to bump up those numbers considerably. I wanted to explain specifically how that affects the state.

For example, now, there is for testing \$22.4 billion for testing 2.5 specifically, for low income. With regard to the testing and contact tracing, we're estimating that \$500 million will go to New Jersey. Now with regard to the vaccines, we bumped up the number to something like \$9 billion for vaccine distribution, which we expect most of that to go to the states. The figures that they gave me today is about \$115 million of that will go for vaccine distribution to the states. It specifically says that has to go out within 21 days, hopefully it will be even sooner.

Now I mention this because I know how hard Commissioner Judy put together this vaccine plan, which she's talked about to the delegation, and I know that you need the money for that. And so, you know, again, let me commend her for putting together a very good plan. But I know you need the cash and hopefully this is going to come out. You're going to be getting it in the next few weeks, if not sooner, and it's specifically for that.

Now, there's also another – there's a lot more for vaccines, there is another \$19 billion for vaccine and therapeutic development and procurement as well, Commissioner, but there's specifically \$9 billion for vaccine distribution, of which I told you what the figure is for the state. Now I could go through all these other numbers, and I won't, but what I want to stress is that it's not just a question of the money. As you know, Governor, when we added the first CARES Act back in March or April when the pandemic started to reach its height, the biggest problem that we had with the Trump administration, and I am going to be somewhat critical, is that the states were on their own. You were constantly competing with other states, hospitals were competing with each other. There was no effective national coordination.

I think the most important thing that we need to understand is that President Biden has made it quite clear that that ends on January 20th when he gets inaugurated. First of all, he said he's going to appoint a national supply commander who's going to coordinate this. And of course, Carol Johnson, who you mentioned and who I know because she worked so much on 21st Century Cures when she was at the White House and at HHS, she's going to be in charge of the testing program and coordinate the testing program. So what you're going to see with Carol, with the new supply commander, with the money, there's also \$3.25 billion of this \$69 billion for the National Stockpile for PPE, testing supplies. Colonel Callahan knows what I'm talking about. We're hopeful that when we have this new administration, and the money that's coming forth in this bill and more, we hope, that we will now have a national coordinated plan so you're not competing with other states. So hospitals are not competing with each other. And we have cooperation with these key people under the Biden Administration and the money and the supplies that goes so you can do a lot more with testing. So you have the reagents, so you don't end up with the problems that you've had all along.

I really want to stress that because it's the money but it's also the lack of coordination and the lack of doing the right thing at the federal level. I mean, look, you, Governor, have been out there on a regular basis, telling people wear masks. You've made a lot of hard decisions about things you've had to close down. But you keep telling people this is being done to crush the virus. We need to crush the virus because otherwise we are never going to get out of the problem with the economy and the slowdown of the economy if we don't crush the virus. I really want to stress all that and say how important it is in the overall scheme of things.

Now, I just wanted to mention one more thing that is in the bill that came out of my committee. You know, one of the things that you've been concerned about with the schools is the fact that a lot of kids and people of low income do not have internet connections. Either they don't have a computer or they can't pay for the connections. So one final point before I wrap up is that we have a lot of families in our state who were struggling to connect to the internet, so we put into this COVID package, it was not again in that Senate bipartisan initial bill, up to \$50 per month to allow struggling families to help pay their internet bills. That's an entirely new program that we put in there that I wanted to mention to you as well.

Let me conclude by now introducing – or not introducing, but we're going to turn it over to Rob Asaro Angelo. Rob, I want to tell you, again, I didn't talk about unemployment or the cash or any of these other things, but I do want to commend the fact that the Governor and you have really worked hard to help with the unemployment problem and providing extra money and managing, even though the President delayed signing this for a week, to make sure that there's no gap in people getting this extra 10 or 11 weeks unemployment.

Again, it'd be nice if it was \$600 instead of \$300 but you've been actually shelling out a lot of this money on your own through the state, Governor. Rob, of course, has played a major role in helping with that. Thank you again, and I will turn it over to Rob.

Governor Phil Murphy: Before Rob jumps in, Frank, I want to thank you again for fighting for us. I'll ask you a quick question if I can. State and local aid is a big deal for us, it's a big deal for you. You mentioned it, you've been fighting for it. In the absence of it, you know, we're risking the services that are being delivered. We're risking the frontline workers being able to stay on their jobs, frankly. Is there magic when January 20th comes on this front? You and I both see this, the way we've talked about it, I think, is very similar. We'll take every penny of the \$908 billion that is coming New Jersey's way. But, you know, it's a fraction of what we need. But specifically on state and local, where do you see that when President Biden is sworn in?

Congressman Frank Pallone: Well, I'm going to have to be very partisan now, unfortunately. I've tried not to be although, you know, I tend to be partisan. Look, the bottom line is that the biggest problem we've had, or the two biggest problems we've had with state and local aid first of all is President Trump who doesn't really want to do it. And second, or maybe I'll put him first, was Mitch McConnell, right? So obviously having Biden, he's going to push for it and see if we can get another appropriations bill or find money without an appropriations bill. And with Mitch McConnell, my hope is obviously that we win those two Senate seats and we have a majority in the Senate and we don't have to worry about him anymore, or at least not as much. But we'll see. I think the bottom line is there's an understanding on behalf of Democrats that this is very important, because again, how do we talk about bringing back the economy if you have to lay off people or can't function and provide government services? That is not shared by a lot of the Republicans in red states. But having Biden president and maybe having a majority Democrat in the Senate would change things. If not, we're going to fight like hell for it anyway.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think that was incredibly diplomatically partisan. In fairness, the partisanship was not started by you or me or us. This is the other side making something a partisan matter when it should not be. This is about state and local aid to red states as much as it is to blue states. It's like wearing a mask. It should not be political. It is factually based what we need. Thank you. I'm sure there'll be questions for you, Frank. Can you hang on?

Congressman Frank Pallone: I'm here for the duration.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great to have you and thank you for everything. You've already introduced him, I'll just jump in and add to that. Please help us welcome, among other things, Rutgers number one fan, the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Rob Asaro Angelo. Rob, thanks to you and your colleagues for all you have done in this extraordinary year, and continue to do as you and we run through the tape of the end of 2020.

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo: Thanks, Governor and thank you for your support for our claimants and for our staff through these difficult times over the past eight months. I'm glad to be joining you today to share what we know and don't yet know about the new stimulus signed this past weekend. Part of the process is that all states must wait for federal guidance on how to implement these programs. However, we don't expect this to negatively affect the majority of our claimants. We're thrilled that workers who've been deemed eligible for benefits will get the help they deserve. It's no secret our unemployed and underemployed neighbors in dire need of additional economic assistance to feed their families and keep the lights on and the heat on.

The Continued Assistance to Unemployed Workers Act of 2020, which is part of the bill signed over the weekend, extends by 11 weeks the eligibility period for pandemic unemployment assistance, or PUA, and the extended pandemic emergency unemployment compensation or PEUC. Despite earlier analysis and guidance last week, our federal partners at the US Department of Labor have assured us there'll be no missed week in benefits even though the stimulus bill was signed today after the commencement of some of its programs.

If I bring one message with me today it is that all current eligible claimants should continue to certify for their weekly benefits. We also know this new bill restarts the federal pandemic unemployment compensation or FPUC for claimants eligible for just \$1 or more in benefits starting this week, the revised program will pay \$300 a week for 11 weeks, and thanks to Congressman Pallone and the rest of our delegation who fought for that higher \$600 amount. Unlike the FEMA program earlier this year, which had multiple layers of eligibility,

this revised FPUC program will be for all current UI claimants but will end, as of now, on March 13th. A vast majority of claimants won't see any changes or experience any hiccups in the certification and payment process. The small group of claimants for whom we are awaiting further guidance from US DOL are the few thousands who have exhausted their federal PUC over the past few weeks.

We're waiting for guidance. It will be an exciting chart like this one which was released not long after the CARES Act. The shows the sequencing of benefit programs. While we wish this were simpler for us and our claimants as usual, the Federal UI system is not simple. For example, a standard UI claim has a maximum of 26 weeks of benefits. After exhausting UI, a claimant would be eligible under the PUC program, which was 13 weeks but is now 24 weeks. After PUC, the claimant would likely be eligible for extended benefits. Since New Jersey is currently in high extended benefits due to our unemployment rate, that duration is 20 weeks. If the claimant is not eligible for EB or if the claimant exhausts EB, they can move to PUA, which was 46 weeks but is now 57 weeks.

The reason I say all this is to show that we're waiting the immediate guidance from the US DOL regarding UI claimants who have already exhausted their 13 weeks of PUC and are currently on EB or PUA. Do they go back to that or do they stay on EB or PUA and move to PUC after? So, as you can see, it's complicated. For the most part, claimants in this situation won't know anything is happening but there might be a delay if they have to move from one program to another. We estimate that this universe is only around 15,000 workers right now. It's hard to say only 15,000 but with 1.5 million claimants it is a small percentage. That does grow by a few thousand each week. US DOL has said its goal is to get guidance out later this week and we're grateful for their direction to the states.

At every turn throughout this pandemic, our decisions are always based on what would get the most money to the most people as soon as possible while adhering to federal guidelines. The struggles many workers face navigating a needlessly convoluted federal unemployment system are not unique to the Garden State. Now, as we enter a new administration in Washington, I remain hopeful these challenges have shined a spotlight on the fact that even with the CARES Act conditions and this new stimulus, the federal unemployment system wasn't designed for everyone who is unemployed, only for those who meet a very specific, stringent and sometimes arbitrary set of eligibility criteria.

It bears repeating, we have made payments to more than 1.5 million workers in New Jersey, more than the population of 11 states. 77% of our claimants have received more than \$10,000 in benefits and 30% have received more than \$20,000 in family sustaining benefits. We're now about 40 weeks since COVID hit and paid out over \$20 billion in benefits. I want to extend a sincere thank you to our claimants for their patience and understanding as we work toward getting our eligible workers the benefits they were due.

Last year, New Jersey Department of Labor led the nation when it comes to percentage of unemployed who receive benefits. I assure you the same team that led us to that success, plus hundreds more, are working on these claims today. We want to remind our workers that we're returning calls every day. So if you're waiting to hear from our department, let us help you move your claim along by answering the call. We share the same goal. If you're eligible, you'll receive the benefits you are due as soon as possible.

With that said, Governor it's worth taking this opportunity to also remind our workers and employers that the minimum wage is about to increase to \$12 an hour on January 1st, one more step on our path to \$15 an hour that you helped put us one, Governor. This year has certainly proven why this action was so important. Thank you again for letting me join you here today and thank you to everyone who supported us. And for all our claimants, we're here for you, we look forward to getting these new benefits out the door as quickly as possible.

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob, thank you. Several things, number one, thank you for the minimum wage reminder to everybody. And some folks have said, hey, listen, given the circumstances that we're under, should that be reconsidered? And the answer is, it can't be. We need and/both. We need more federal help to help us help our small businesses and we need to let the minimum wage continue to go on its . march toward \$15. We have far too many people in our state living below the poverty line and so that's a another big step. Thank you for reminding.

Secondly, Rob, thank you for the great effort by you and your team. They've done an extraordinary job. By the way, if you're one of the few percent that you have not got your claim yet processed, or you look at the headlines and you compare what we've done to other states, which I think is a record where Rob and I and your team are proud to stand on. We know it doesn't make you less frustrated, we know it doesn't make you less stressful. But it is worth reminding folks again, at the same time, that the performance in New Jersey relative to other states in this year has been, thanks to Rob and team, outstanding. And again, that's not to alleviate anybody's pain who are going through hell this year.

And lastly, maybe given we've got Frank on with us, Rob, President-Elect Joe Biden has not yet named a Secretary of Labor, unless he did this morning. I would love to be able to work with Frank and our delegation and the new Secretary, whoever it is, to streamline the unemployment insurance reality. That eye chart that you put up and the acronyms, it's not your fault. It's the federal government's fault. It's crazy. I think we've got as good an experience in terms of understanding that system as any American state. I'd love it if you guys could figure out a way and count me in to help to work with the incoming Secretary, whoever it may be, to at long last renovate and revolutionize that federal system. That's maybe on our New Year's wish list. Rob, thank you again for everything.

Please help me welcome – it took me longer to get to her today, but it's with no less passion, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and Congressman Pallone. Good afternoon. Well, New Jersey continues our journey to vaccinate 70% of the eligible adult population by vaccinating individuals who fall into Phase 1A. New Jersey has been awarded over 400,000 vaccine doses in this month. Of that, approximately 120,000 doses have been reserved for long-term care facilities, residents and employees; 280,000 doses have been allocated to hospitals and our community sites. Of that, approximately 265,000 doses have actually been delivered. The remainder is expected at the end of this week. In New Jersey, we're expecting an additional 106,000 doses during the first week of January. Of that, 53,000 doses have been reserved for long-term care facilities, and another 53,000 allocated to hospitals and community sites.

As of this morning, 62,901 individuals have been vaccinated. We started in mid-December by fortifying our hospitals, including prioritizing those at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19. This week, New Jersey's plan continued into our vulnerable skilled nursing facilities, using the CDC-supported pharmacy partnership program for long-term care. To date, 539 facilities have been scheduled to receive their first vaccinations through this program. The federal program expects to vaccinate more than 109,000 residents and staff through the beginning of February, with more sites of congregate living to be added in the coming weeks.

As Phase 1A progresses, we are expanding access to vaccine to non-hospital-based healthcare personnel. To increase awareness of sites where these individuals can be vaccinated, the department sent out letters to eligible healthcare personnel, including certified nurse aides, physicians, EMS, hospice workers, dialysis center workers, the Medical Reserve Corps, school nurses, and direct support professionals that work in IDD, intellectual or developmental disability centers, to alert them that they are eligible to be vaccinated. We have shared a list of sites and encouraged healthcare personnel to call the site's phone number to schedule an appointment.

Vaccine recipients that fall into Phase 1A can choose the vaccine dispensing site nearest to their home or work. This information has also been posted on the COVID-19 hub at covid19.nj.gov/vaccine. The list will continue to be updated as more sites are ready to serve healthcare personnel in the 1A category. To date, over 200 sites have been stood up.

As a reminder, healthcare personnel are paid and unpaid persons serving in healthcare settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials. This includes any type of worker within a healthcare center. For example, licensed healthcare professionals like doctors, nurses, pharmacists and dentists; staff like receptionist janitors, mortuary services, laboratory technicians, consultants per diem and contractors who are directly employed and present at the facilities; unpaid workers like health care professionals, students, trainees, volunteers and essential caregivers; community health workers, doulas,

public health professionals like the Medical Reserve Corps; personnel with variable venues like EMS, paramedics, funeral staff, and autopsy workers and other paid and unpaid people who work in healthcare settings.

In January, New Jersey will launch its statewide vaccine scheduling system, the New Jersey vaccine scheduling system, NJVSS, will help all potential Phase 1A vaccine recipients to identify nearby points of dispensing and schedule an appointment. Once this registration system is live, another notification will be sent to all eligible populations.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 3,727 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and PUI, patients under investigation, with 701 individuals in critical care and 67% of those critical care patients are on ventilators.

There are two new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, for a total of 69 cases in our state. These children have either tested positive for active COVID-19 infection, or have had antibody tests that were positive for COVID-19 exposure. Fortunately, in New Jersey, there are no new deaths at this point in time.

At the state veterans homes, sadly in Vineland, there are two additional deaths among their residents. Vineland reports a cumulative total of seven deaths in the Vineland home. At our state psychiatric hospitals, there have been eight positive cases among patients at Ancora, and six positive cases at Trenton Psych.

In New Jersey on December 26th, the percent positivity was 15.19%. The Northern part of the state reports 14.79%, the Central part of the state 16.03%, and the Southern part of the state 14.60.

That concludes my daily report. Stay safe, and remember for each other and for us all, please take the call, download the COVID Alert NJ app and have a very safe New Year's.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for that report and for all. Let me ask you, do you agree – or if you disagree, you or Tina, Tina Tan is on, Parimal Garg, our Chief Counsel is on to help us answer questions after Pat gives his report. But do you believe it's the case that I had speculated earlier that if you're getting tested on Christmas, you're getting tested for a reason?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I think most people that would get tested during a holiday are probably not feeling well or are in fear that they have been exposed.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, and probably I'm going to extend that probably to the 26th as well. But thank you again for everything. Pat, welcome. Any updates on compliance? Weather tomorrow looks a little sloppy, we'd love to get your assessment on that and we'd love for you to reiterate your New Year's Eve safety, drinking and other warnings. Great to have you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. And if I could just take a few seconds to thank Congressman Pallone. Our paths first crossed after Superstorm Sandy hit and his advocacy then, more than eight years ago and every single delegation call that we hosted from the ROIC, Congressman Pallone led the charge and was there shoulder to shoulder with us. I just wanted to thank you publicly, Congressman for all of your support.

In terms of compliance, there are several. I'll go through them quickly, all EO violations. Paterson, La Café was cited by Paterson police; in West Orange, Zaluba Bar was cited. Again, these are basically overcapacity, no facial coverings. In Newark, Vivo was cited. In East Hanover, police responded to a large house party where the homeowner there was issued a summons for an EO violation. In South River Kilimanjaro Lounge was cited. In Newark, residents I think most probably saw this in the paper, a very large house party. Again, they were cited. In West Orange, Zaluba Bar, again, this was the fifth time that they were cited for violations of the Executive Order. And then in addition to those enforced by the local police departments, the Attorney General, General Grewal, issued a press release today with regards to 12 bars and restaurants where they have been cited and they are seeking to suspend and/or revoke the liquor licenses. I'll read, these vary from a possible 10-day suspension upwards of an 85-day suspension, and they are as follows, Governor. Serena's Bar in Clifton; Bar El Encesaire in Passaic, Sports Bar in Passaic, 626 in Jersey City, La Rumba Paca Tavern, in West New York, Vintage Wines and Baca's Bar in Old Bridge, Fat Cactus Cantina in New Brunswick, El Tenempa in South River, VMR Bar and Restaurant in South River, Donovan's Restaurant in Manchester, Bayers Tavern in

Gloucester, and Flip Flops in North Wildwood. I think it should be noted that, under Director Graziano, ABC has initiated enforcement actions against more than 200 establishments in response to COVID-19, and those actions have been anywhere from warnings, fines invoked, license suspensions and license revocations. But I also still note as you do, Governor the vast majority of compliance, given the amount of bars and restaurants that we have here in New Jersey.

With regard to weather, New Year's Eve is drier Thursday afternoon. I think there's going to be rain forecast the early part of New Year's Eve. On New Year's Day, rain is forecast from around noon to 7:00 a.m. Saturday morning, and some folks in the northern counties are probably going to see a wintry mix of sleet and ice and snow. In that forecast, precipitation is forecast to change to all rain Friday evening given the rising temperatures.

As I mentioned on Monday, not only state, county, local law enforcement, we want this to be, beyond COVID-19, we want this to be a safe New Year's Eve holiday and one that we've never experienced before. We will have additional patrols out there. Just ask people to celebrate responsibly, don't drink and drive. It is not worth it. It is not worth your life. It is not worth harming somebody else. And even if you were stopped and arrested, it is not worth the suspensions and the fines and the consequences of being charged and found guilty of driving while intoxicated.

I wish everybody has a safe and peaceful New Year's and I am looking forward to 2021 as well. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. Good, smart, common sense warning at the end, folks. Please do the right thing. On the COVID side, stay small and if you're going to be something other than small, Judy, go outside, right? Even if you're getting wet. As it relates to celebrating beyond COVID, don't drink and drive. Do not, under any circumstances, put your own life or other's lives at risk.

So a couple of housekeeping items, I assume Michelle D'Angelo will coordinate some questions. We will take about 15 or 20 minutes. We went long deliberately today, because we felt it was important, not just for the three of us to give our daily updates but to have Frank and Rob here, given all the moving parts of the past week, and I thank them again for being here. We'll be virtual with you each of the next number of days unless you hear otherwise. We're scheduled to be back on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday routine beginning Monday at one o'clock, although we have not yet heard from the White House as to whether or not we will have a White House VTC, which have more often than not taken place on Mondays. Mahen or Dan will let you know if that changes. But otherwise, we'll be with you at the War Memorial, back live at one o'clock on Monday.

Judy, it's hard to believe this, but this is good news. Some of the Pfizer first wave healthcare workers who got their vaccinations in the first days are now going to be up for round two, which is another great milestone. My suspicion is you may see Judy and me out on the road celebrating that milestone with them. With that, let's take a few questions. Again, we'll go 15 or 20 minutes if that's okay with everybody, try to be as economical as possible. We'll do everything we can to answer.

Q&A Session

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon, Governor. Real quick just on vaccinations, some 16,600 additional people have been vaccinated since the Commissioner gave an update on Monday. I'm just curious for your feedback on whether there's any cause for concern about the number of people? That's a lower number of people, considering the hundreds of thousands of people in the 1A category. Or is the vaccination plan rolling out the way that you anticipated?

In nursing homes, deaths in nursing homes more than doubled this month compared to November. I know that the overall number of deaths have gone up month over month, but could you address why those numbers are rising, considering the state beefed up testing efforts and made other restrictions and implemented other things in long-term care facilities?

And lastly, have you heard back from the Legislature on your cleanup bill to address under age penalty for marijuana? Is there any compromise between the administration and the Legislature that would get it back on track? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sure. Good to hear from you. Happy New Year, Matt. I'll go in reverse. Nothing new to report but a very good spirit of goodwill to try to address the issues that we've been trying to address together, and do it in a way that is the right way. In other words, protect kids. We've all been all in for adult, that means 21 and up, but we're also all in for decriminalizing this offence. We're still working on that but again, a spirit of goodwill and I want to give a shout out to our Legislative leadership, both the Senate President and the Speaker and their teams.

I think if you look, I don't know this because I don't have this right in front of me, Matt, if you look, sadly, at fatalities, period, December to November, they're up dramatically. I don't know that they're necessarily doubled overall, but they're up dramatically. We test far more than we did months ago in long-term care facilities but we continue, and Frank Pallone said this, we continue to suffer from the lack of a national strategy to address COVID, and that includes testing.

Judy has beta tested wherever she could across long-term care facilities and she's reported out, especially getting people at the door as they come in, staff, loved ones, and there's still a shocking amount of asymptomatic COVID positives in our state, period, including in and around long-term care.

Judy, I'll address the vaccine question and then throw it to you for anything you want to add on vaccines or long-term care. The answer is, Matt, it is going the way that we have anticipated, but as I mentioned on Monday in response to a similar question, that's in the context of a huge supply-demand imbalance. The long-term care federal program that again, Judy succeeded in broadening that definition as much as any American state, which started on Monday, the good news is that's off and running. CVS and Walgreens are executing but I think we won't have a good sense of the positive numeric impact on how many folks are getting vaccinated probably until a week from now or so. I think then you'll see some real progress not just with the 1A healthcare workers, but also with residents and staff in long-term care. Judy, anything you want to add on outbreaks, which you've been reporting faithfully, outbreaks by the hundreds in long-term care. Our seniors continue to be our most vulnerable population, particularly if they're in a congregate living environment, but also progress? Is the vaccine distribution and access and administration consistent with what you would have wanted?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: First on long-term care, we have over 400 facilities reporting active outbreaks. That certainly does not make us happy. We have PPE, we have cohorting, we have staff. They're doing all the right things and the disease is still coming in to the long-term care facilities. We have tested, we have performed over 2.7 million tests in long-term care. We had a two-week pilot where we tested everyone coming into the long-term care facilities to try to, as the Governor said, stop the virus at the door. And it's still coming in. This virus is relentless and it preys on vulnerable, elderly individuals. I don't know what else more to say about that. I think the facilities, the staff are doing the best they can at this point in time and we continue to test everyone two to three times a week to try to stop it at the door.

On the vaccines, it's a logistical issue. We want to do it by appointments because you don't want to puncture a vial and take out four doses and have one dose leftover because if you do, you have to use it within six hours and if you don't, it's wasted. People are being very careful, logistically.

Secondly, we never know how many doses we're getting. They're scheduling according to an assumption of the expectation of doses and it's been so variable. The cadence of it has not been steady. We expect that to improve. Along with the pharmacy partnership program, I think you're going to see a significant increase in the numbers.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, also on long-term care, it's fair to say we're not unique. This is not just a nationwide, a global reality. Frank, you see that, I'm sure, from your perch as Chair of Energy and Commerce, which oversees all the healthcare laws of our country. And secondly, the Manatt report, which Judy had the strength to commission and then from that a lot of recommendations, including bills that I've signed and other Executive Orders that we've each promulgated, have improved the reality. But as Judy rightfully says, this virus is relentlessly. That's the word you used and we have to remember, especially with our vulnerable populations, thank you for that.

Karen Yi, WNYC: Does the vaccine portal that you guys launched today include data for how many vaccine doses have been administered? And if it doesn't, when can we expect to see that? And will it include a demographic breakdown, like by race, ethnicity?

Of the 62,000 vaccine doses administered, do you know how many were administered at long-term care facilities? Can you speak a little bit about how the Department of Health is determining how many vaccine dosages they allocate to different county and community sites, and how basically you're going to ensure that there's equitable distribution happening?

Governor Phil Murphy: Karen, thank you for those. The portal will eventually, without question, I hope within a couple of weeks, have absolutely the number that have been administered and I assume, Judy, it will also have a breakdown on race and ethnicity. On the 62,000 how much in long-term care, I don't have that percentage, Judy, you may have that. Most importantly, I think to Karen's last question, equity and getting this distributed and administered in an equitable way has been a core principle of you and your outside advisors. Would love you to address that as well.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. I will have to get back to you on the number that have already been administered in long-term care. I don't have that in front of me. But the equitable allocation is a great question. We look at the population and the disease burden of the population and try to distribute equitably to where it's needed the most. It's not a hard and fast percentage, but it definitely follows intercity population and disease burden.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Karen. Hey, Brian.

Brian Thompson, NBC 4: Two questions, Governor, one following up on the vaccine that I think it was Matt who asked about. I tried calling a couple of these pharmacies, Shoprite, for example. One Shoprite said they get 10 a day and you have to have a reservation, an appointment of course, and they're not taking any more appointments until the middle of February. Another one hasn't gotten their vaccine, they expect it any day.

The question then becomes, what advice for these 1A workers, EMS sort of thing, when they're told that an appointment calendar at a Shoprite Pharmacy is not taking anything until the middle of February? They have 400 people who've already signed up? What advice can we give them at this point in order to get the vaccine as quickly as possible?

The other question, Governor is kind of out of the blue, but I heard a healthcare professional expert on MSNBC this morning saying that her advice is that everybody should get the first shot and not worry about the second shot. In other words, the efficacy of 50% is worth it for everybody and wait a few months until the supplies come for the second shot. I wonder if you had any opinion on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Brian. I think we need to wave Tina in from the bullpen on the second one in a minute. But on the first one, I don't have a specific insight as to the Shoprite reality. I think, Judy, we have got 650,000 healthcare workers. Does that sound about right? And then another several hundred thousand long-term care residents and staff. It's part of the reason why we've deployed the National Guard and other resources to set up these mega sites, which will be a January reality. I can't speak to the specifics of the Shoprite, but we can get back to you. Judy, maybe go to you before Tina on that.

I listen to Tony Fauci on this and I heard him say loud and clear that the first shot gives you some amount of protection but it's the booster, the second one, that takes you into the promised land of 90 something percent effectiveness. To me, I don't know who that healthcare person was. I'm following Tony on this one. Judy, any comments on either the Shoprite question or vaccines and then Tina, we would love to get your validation or correction to my answer on that.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The reality of the long waits is real. It's caused by vaccine availability. By next week, our preregistration site will be up. We're encouraging individuals to preregister and if they cannot get a site within a period of time, they'll be put on a list and be moved to the closest date for the vaccination. This is all about availability of the vaccine. We expected that the supply would not be enough to meet the demand right out of the chute. We expected this to happen. That's why we've been very clear that 1A is for paid and unpaid healthcare workers in long-term care and congregate settings. We just don't have enough vaccine. That will smooth out. New vaccines will come and more vaccine doses will come, but not in January.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, should we turn to Tina on the question of one shot versus two? Tina, good to have you.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Thank you, Governor. Governor, you're absolutely correct. You know, as far as the second dose, the whole purpose is to help bolster that efficacy. It's important to note there are several comments that one can make related to that. All these different recommendations about the number of doses, this is all weighed by numerous experts. You have to remember that we have CDC and their Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices reviewing all the pharmaceutical company data on these vaccines. We have FDA's Advisory Committee, and looking at the data and looking at the efficacy data. As of now, you know, what we understand about the vaccine is that the greatest efficacy comes from getting the second dose.

I think it's also important to note that while we know these qualities of the efficacy of the vaccine after the second dose, right now, many of our public health partners, the CDC, we're all taking a look at ultimately also the vaccine effectiveness. That's the real world. You know, how the vaccine plays out in the real world situation. Right now, we're giving vaccines to numerous different sites, different types of providers, and we have to see how the efficacy actually plays out in the real world scenarios. That's why we have always looked at the expertise of our expert panels from CDC, from FDA, making those recommendations to ensure that getting that second dose is going to be the most valuable way to go.

Congressman Frank Pallone: Governor, could I just say something in response to Brian? Brian, one of the concerns, why I think the suggestion of give everybody the first one and don't worry about the second one, you know, until later down is not a good idea is because there's reason to believe that if you didn't have the second one, there might be a problem with the efficacy. In other words, you said it's 50% from the first one, but we don't know how long that lasts. And so therefore, you have to have the second one within the 21 days to make sure that it continues to be effective, because without it, you may lose that 50% efficacy.

And the other thing I want to say, and again, I'm being very partisan, is that, you know, yesterday at his press conference, President-Elect Biden pointed out that under Trump they had promised 20 million people were supposed to get their first shot by the end of the year, and it's only been like, 2.1 million, so 10%. Biden said that's not acceptable and he's going to, in the first 100 days of his administration, do 100 million. Again, this is partially the fact that this federal government under Trump has not pushed out the level of vaccine to the states that they were supposed to get. I know Judy probably doesn't want to say that, but I'll say it because it's true. Hopefully with a change of administration we're going to get better coordination, you're going to have Carol and you're going to have more of these vaccines being pushed out. That's what Biden is promising.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well said, well said. Thank you for that. Michelle, let's try to squeeze in a couple more if that's okay.

David Wildstein, New Jersey Globe: Governor, the State Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars criticized you this week for failing to fill seats on the Veterans Memorial Home Advisory Council, and he called for an appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the deaths at the state-run long-term healthcare facilities. Mr. Steinhardt did also. I wanted to see if you have a timeline for filling those seats? Do you think the Attorney General should name a special prosecutor?

My second question is at this point, with the resignation of Commissioner Johnson, you have four vacancies in your Cabinet with an additional two Cabinet nominations still not approved by the Senate. I wanted to ask if it was your intention to nominate permanent replacements for those four vacancies before the end of your current term? If so, do you have a timeline on that?

Governor Phil Murphy: On the second one, the answer is yes. I mean that's our intention, as always. A couple of footnotes, number one, we have great, you know, Sarah Edelman is a great example of this. We are blessed with really strong benches, so when we lose someone like Carol, which is a huge loss, but, frankly, as Frank Pallone just mentioned, we get a huge benefit from that as well, because she knows the New Jersey situation so cold in that national position, she's going to be a great for us. But again, we've got great interims. Sarah is a great example of this, a great bench and great interim leadership. But the answer is yes. Having a permanent leadership is absolutely our objective.

Nothing really to add. I did not see the comments by the State Commander other than some things that I've said before that I want to reiterate, number one, God bless our veterans. I don't know where our country would be without them. Secondly, they've been clobbered in these three homes, as have other long-term care facilities around our state, around our country, including other veterans homes around our country. Thirdly,

we've made changes and you saw those changes were aggressive in leadership, and those were done for a reason. Fourthly, there's all sorts of focus, whether it be legal focus or other investigatory focus on this reality, and that's something that is known and it is ongoing.

I'll conclude where I started. God bless our veterans that paid an enormous price in New Jersey and around our country. We hold them on a pedestal as we always do. Thank you for that.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Happy New Year, everybody. Congressman, I'm wondering whether your office has tried to put any pressure on the Trump administration regarding these shortcomings? Do you believe that the lack of timely vaccination delivery is deliberate or is it incompetence or something else?

Also, for the Governor, we've really gotten just a fraction of these vaccinations administered. Is there a lack of personnel? You and the Commissioner have said that we need more vaccines, but what's keeping the vaccines that we have from being delivered? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Frank, I'll do the second one and give one thought on the first and then hand it to you. And Judy should talk about this, you know, we're trying to schedule – and by the way, I don't know when we'll be able to have those ticker numbers on the dashboard but it'll be sooner than later. I think when you look at what we're doing per capita in our state, relative to the 1A population, relative to the broader population, I think we're going to look to be in very good shape in the context of, again, I have to remind everybody, is a huge imbalance of supply and demand.

Judy should weigh in here as well, Judy made this point earlier. We are in the process of setting up hundreds of these locations, some of them are going to be mega sites, and we have to schedule. Remember, you need healthcare workers to do this. I'm not qualified to deliver these vaccines. You've got to schedule these things based on what you expect the supply to be and that supply from the federal government, frankly, has not been what it what they have said originally and it's moved around. So it's not just that it isn't what they said but it's also a number that moves around from week to week.

I'll give you an example. This week, between Pfizer and Moderna, Judy correct me if I'm wrong, 121,650 doses. Next week, it's 106,825 first doses, and happily, as I've mentioned, 76,050 second doses, but we don't know that until Tuesday of each week. No American state does. This is not just not at the level that we're promised, it is also relatively volatile.

Frank, I would come back to you, I assume the shortcomings, Elise, you mean in vaccinations or in testing or general? I don't know that it's still – I don't have any evidence, Frank, it's deliberate toward New Jersey. We do not have that, although we do not have – I have to say, no state right now has color into the backstory here on the vaccines not delivered to New Jersey, but I will, with that, hand it over to you, Frank, for your thoughts.

Congressman Frank Pallone: Well, I would never say that there's any deliberate effort here. But look, the bottom line is, I started out today explaining that the federal government is not doing enough, first of all, because of money. I mean, you know, the Governor is obviously very concerned about the direct state and local aid. Remember, if you got the direct, Judy is using her own money for this, right? I don't mean her money, I mean state money. The Governor is using state dollars for months now for whether it's testing, vaccines, whatever it is. The money has not been forthcoming. And so, you know, I said that we tried to boost – we didn't try, we succeeded as Democrats in boosting the money up in this Omnibus or end of year package. It was only \$17 billion for vaccines, testing and contact tracing, the total package is up to \$69 billion and a lot of that's been boosted up, of which \$9 billion is specifically for vaccine distribution.

But at the same time, you know, the same is true for testing and contact tracing. You know, President Trump at one point said we didn't even need to do any more testing or contact tracing, whereas governor Murphy has been out there every day talking about how people should cooperate when they get a call. You know, a lot of this was just the fact that the Trump administration did not see testing and contact tracing as important, or didn't even think we should do it at all. They talked about the vaccine, but they didn't provide the money for it. Now we're starting to see a change.

And what Judy said about, you know, hopefully now with Biden coming in, he said yesterday it's only 10% of what it was supposed to be by the end of the month. Now he's saying 100 million people vaccinated in the first 100 days. We're also starting to see good news that there may be more vaccine; AstraZeneca, J&J now,

New Jersey based, are close to approval. We think that they may be approved in January. I think one of them was already approved in the UK. I think that the Commissioner is correct in saying that there's a lot of hope with the new administration and more vaccine approvals coming that we'll see a difference. But a big part of this has been the Trump administration just not doing what they were supposed to do. If anything, you know, saying it wasn't even important.

Governor Phil Murphy: Frank, thank you for that. Judy, anything you want to add, particularly on the second question that Elise asked? Number of actual vaccines versus what our allocations are?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, the first thing is, remember, the Pfizer vaccine came out first. We sent that to hospitals that had the capacity for ultra-cold chain. As I sit here today, 57% of the Pfizer doses have been administered. That's one of the highest percentages that I've seen nationally.

On the other hand, Moderna was delivered right before Christmas, and the dates of the 24th, 25th, 26th, and 27th were extremely low vaccine days, extremely low administration days, for two reasons. There were no vaccinations on the 25th and on the other days, people didn't want to be sick, they were concerned they were not going to feel well for the holidays. So it's ticked up again. We look at it, obviously, daily. We need to do some work on Moderna. But the Pfizer vaccines, almost 60% of doses delivered is a pretty high percentage.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. As I said, I think in the fullness of the next week or two when we start to get the long-term care numbers online, and remember, those are all Pfizer because of the ultra-cold chain requirement, so CVS and Walgreens are national chains and they're doing that for a reason. I think the numbers are going to begin to settle out in a good place for us. But again, we can only do so much, to Frank's points. I know we've run over. Let's do one more, and then Mahen, you can follow up with anyone else who had questions and either get to any of us for follow up. Dustin, Good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. I had asked this the other day but I couldn't quite glean the answer, and I keep getting asked about it. Are prison inmates getting vaccinated? And if so, can you explain why that is? Why being vaccinated along with healthcare workers and people in nursing homes? Unless I'm mistaken, I don't think that inmates or correctional staff are in the 1A category, but correct me if I'm wrong.

Have we seen any evidence yet of the new strain of coronavirus which has now been found in Colorado? That's all I have. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Dustin, Happy New Year. Let's just say the following. Number one, other vulnerable communities are not in 1A. We know that our prison population is a very vulnerable community and it's why I think we've done this responsibly and safely, but we have dramatically reduced our prison population for a number of reasons, by the way, and I want to do that more as it relates to non-violent crimes, for instance, with minimum mandatory sentences as an example. But in the midst of the pandemic, one of the important reasons and drivers, assuming we could do it responsibly and safely, was to reduce prison population.

I do believe as a separate matter outside the 1A, 1B, 1C, there is at least some movement afoot. Parimal, you may want to come in here, as a parallel matter I believe, between Rutgers if my memory serves me, and our prison population. I'm not sure, I can't say, Dustin that I know that that has begun. Parimal, on that one, could you weigh in on that if you could?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yeah, we'll circle back on that one.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dustin, I literally didn't write your second question down, which is a fail by me. Judy, anything you want to add?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I just want to add that we do consider when the CDC moved from long-term care to congregate settings, we do consider the prison population a congregate setting. We're working with Commissioner Hicks to vaccinate the prison population and the employees that care for them under that heading of congregate. They did not fit into the pharmacy program, but they do fit into our definition.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dustin, forgive me, the second question.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Yeah, I'm assuming that since it wasn't brought up earlier, that it may not be the case but I'm just wondering if we've seen any evidence yet of that newer strain of coronavirus, which has now been reported in Colorado.

Governor Phil Murphy: My bad. Thank you for that and I'm very happy you asked it. I'm not aware of it. But Tina, you should weigh in here. Again, I think we said this on Monday, we're assuming the worst, we're assuming that it's in our midst. The basic stuff still applies even more so, it's more highly transmittable. Secondly, there's no evidence and Tina, you should weigh in on all this, that the vaccine is less efficacious with this or that this is more lethal. It spreads more easily, but appears to be, and again it's incomplete scientific data, appears to be no more lethal. Tina, come on in and correct the record.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Right now we do not have any evidence that this new variant has emerged here in New Jersey, but I do want to mention that our public health laboratory is in the process of ramping up its own sequencing capacity. It actually does participate in CDC's national strain surveillance activities. We always send representative samples of our viruses down to CDC for sequencing as well. We anticipate that probably in the next several weeks, there are going to be more variant cases, unfortunately or fortunately, that we're able to identify here in the US in general.

As the Governor had mentioned, there's no evidence at this time about this new variant causing more severe illness or less severe illness, for that matter. We also do not have any evidence about whether there will be any issues with the vaccine right now or with therapeutics associated with SARS Cov-2. That's why we continue to monitor what the situation is.

But that said, we have to continue to take those measures to prevent the spread of the virus in general, whether it's the new variant or whether it's our existing, more common virus here. Again, wash your hands, social distance, mask up, those are the keys.

Governor Phil Murphy: The basics still apply. Judy, anything you want to add or are you good? You're good. Listen, everybody, I normally say I'm masking up but I'm sitting here in this little corner by myself, so I will not mask up, but theoretically mask up. I want to thank Chairman Congressman Frank Pallone, Frank, for being with us today and for your incredible, tireless advocacy on behalf of doing the right thing specifically for New Jersey. Rob Asaro Angelo, thanks to you and your team for doing everything you do to plough through an extraordinary year. I'm sure the 2021 will open up similarly, so our thanks will remain.

If you're out there, folks and you haven't yet been gotten to, I promise you, they'll do everything they can to get to you sooner than later. Assuming you're eligible, you'll get every penny that's coming to you. Judy and Tina, thank you for everything today and always. Judy, your leadership this year has been indispensable. That is probably the very least I can say about it. Tina, thank you as well. Pat, bless you. Let's reiterate what you said, let's be responsible and safe for New Year's Eve and New Year's celebrations. Parimal, thanks to you and the rest of the team.

Folks, we turn the page. It is not a light switch. That war footing that I referred to earlier will still be on on Friday just as we're on today. Just because it's 2021, slowly but surely, particularly with a robust federal partnership going over the next number of months, we're going to get this resolved. We're going to do that together. As Tina said, the basics still apply. Face coverings, social distancing, washing your hands with soap and water, stay small. This is more lethal indoors than outdoors and use your common sense. If you don't feel well, if you've been exposed, take yourself off the field. After having waited the requisite number of days, get tested. We have the capacity, go out there and get tested. God bless you all thank you for everything you've done by the millions this year. Let's keep pounding away early 2021 and before you know it, we'll be in a dramatically different and better place. Happy New Year, everybody.

Governor Phil Murphy

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