

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **DeSantis Ignores Higher Ed Faculty, Employees in Vaccination Plans**

Earlier this week, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a new executive order expanding access to the Covid vaccines to firefighters, law enforcement and K-12 employees age 50 and older. The United Faculty of Florida (UFF) and the 22,000 people we represent congratulate the public servants who are now eligible for the vaccines and celebrate their chance at hope. Nonetheless, we are appalled by the governor's decision to exclude college and university workers from this mandate.

Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>1</sup> identifies college and university faculty as "people who work in educational settings" and those "having increased risk of acquiring or transmitting Covid-19" should be considered a priority for vaccination purposes. Many retail pharmacy-service providers, such as CVS and Walmart, are reported to be going with the federal guidance and offering vaccines to all K-12 employees regardless of age. Yet higher education employees are left out, even though the population in college settings tends to spread the virus at a higher rate.

College and university faculty are working on the frontlines of this pandemic, and our lives and the lives of our students are not disposable. College and university librarians, counselors, graduate employees, food workers, residence hall assistants and maintenance staff are also in need of priority access to the vaccine if the governor wants Florida's 40 institutions of higher education to open fully.

### **Below are reactions from UFF leaders across the state:**

**Karen Morian, UFF president,** [karen.morian@floridaea.org](mailto:karen.morian@floridaea.org):

"The recent announcement by Gov. DeSantis that educators 50 and over will begin to be eligible for vaccinations in Florida, does NOT include the faculty and staff at our state's 40 public institutions of higher education. This is NOT acceptable. Now that the governor has admitted the scientific value of vaccinations and publicly voiced support for vaccines, we call on him to recognize that education in Florida continues beyond K-12 and to include ALL educators in Florida's vaccination programs.

"UFF [has been calling for adequate safeguards](#), including testing and tracing, since the pandemic began. Some colleges have been more responsive than others, negotiating memoranda of understanding with local UFF chapters to jointly craft new, safer working conditions. On a statewide level, this MUST include offering equal access for State University System (SUS) and Florida College System (FCS) faculty and staff to make the very personal choice of whether or not to be vaccinated."

**Jaffar Shahul-Hameed, UFF first vice president,** [jaffar.hameed@floridaea.org](mailto:jaffar.hameed@floridaea.org):

"Vaccine access is crucial to bring normalcy back in our lives and the economy. Vaccines are essential for all teachers — both K-12 and higher education — as we interact with millions of Floridians every single day, especially the younger generation. It is disappointing, to say the least, that higher education faculty are not considered as 'classroom teachers' for vaccine access. Higher ed faculty teach about 1 million students in Florida, and a significant number of higher education faculty are compelled to teach face-to-face classes. Excluding higher education faculty from vaccination is risking the health of millions of citizens — higher ed teachers and their loved ones, students and their loved ones, and higher education community neighbors and their loved ones — and is simply unacceptable. We hope this will be

reversed ASAP, and Florida higher education teachers will have access to vaccines just like all teachers.”

**Kally Malcom, president, UFF-University of North Florida,** [info@kallymalcolm.com](mailto:info@kallymalcolm.com):

Higher education faculty are being compelled back to the classroom, too. Our students are falling ill each week too — and so are we. I urge the governor to immediately grant higher-ed faculty access to these life-saving vaccines.”

**Martha Meyer, president, UFF-Florida International University,** [martha.meyer@uff-fiu.org](mailto:martha.meyer@uff-fiu.org):

“It is extremely disappointing that the governor of the state of Florida will boast about the accomplishments of our higher education institutions in order to show that the state is worth investing in, and will simultaneously force faculty and staff to return to campus without prioritizing their health and safety. This is a failure on the part of the governor to address the entire PreK-20 education in his state as a collective essential entity.

“Florida International University (FIU) is uniquely situated with many of our students living in multi-generational families, and there is a rise in the number of variant Covid cases in Miami. Couple that with a purposeful omission of higher education employees from receiving the vaccine, and this solidifies the narrative that the decisions about our universities and state colleges’ communities are not being driven by logic or science. If the leadership of this state truly wants a “return to normal,” they would prioritize the expansion of vaccine eligibility to include all folks in all educational settings. Our faculty *want* to get back to teaching face-to-face and interacting directly with students, but they have valid concerns about safety on campus. Getting faculty and staff a vaccine is necessary for protecting our entire campus community.”

**Roscoe Hightower, Jr. president, UFF-Florida A & M University,** [roscoe.hightowerjr@gmail.com](mailto:roscoe.hightowerjr@gmail.com):

“If the Florida governor is working on its citizens’ behalf to prioritize vaccination needs in the state equitably and thereby reopening the state for a healthy, strong, and sustainable economic recovery, we ask for common sense to prevail. Higher education faculty must be included with K-12 personnel when it comes to vaccine distribution in the great state of Florida.”

**Dawn Bergeron, president, UFF-St Johns River State College,** [dawnmariebergeron@icloud.com](mailto:dawnmariebergeron@icloud.com):

“The college community is equally at risk, and in some cases, more vulnerable. College faculty, staff and students in postsecondary institutions meet in classrooms, offices and other campus locations — days, nights and weekends. Colleges are also home to non-traditional students, including those over the age of 50.”

**Steve Kirn, Co-Chair UFF-University of Florida COVID Task Force,** [skirn@mac.com](mailto:skirn@mac.com):

“The University of Florida established its rigid face-to-face teaching requirements even before vaccines were available. It seems the right thing to do to provide this critical layer of protection now that even President Biden feels that we will have vaccine supply for all adults who want one, by the end of May.”

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*The United Faculty of Florida represents more than 20,000 faculty at all 12 public universities, 15 colleges and Saint Leo University, along with graduate assistants at four universities.*

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/downloads/COVID-19-Vaccination-Program-Interim\\_Playbook.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/downloads/COVID-19-Vaccination-Program-Interim_Playbook.pdf) page 15.