

April 2nd, 2021

Gail Johnson
Commissioner, At large

[REDACTED]

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Gainesville, FL 32627-0490

Dear Commissioner Johnson,

We are writing to you as constituents and students of Gainesville in regard to how the houseless community in Gainesville is being affected and treated during this pandemic. As of 2018, Alachua County has [641](#) people who are unhoused residents. The number of unhoused community members has only increased due to the pandemic. The houseless community are still members of our community and, more importantly, your constituents. During this pandemic, all members of our community, in due time, are going to be eligible to get the Covid-19 vaccine. We are writing to you in order to urge you to put in place the proper programs and protections that allow for members of the houseless community to also receive the vaccine, since they are very much members of our community who have been affected by this pandemic.

While exact statistics of COVID-19 infection rates among the unhoused population are lacking, we know that unhoused folks are in a [high risk demographic](#). This is [largely due](#) to the communal and congregative nature of their existence. Within shelters and encampments unhoused folks remain in close quarters, making it nearly impossible to implement the preventative measures detailed by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. This alone heightens the infection rate among unhoused folks. Moreover, research from Yale School of Medicine [confirms](#) that unhoused individuals are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19 as they are more likely to be older smokers or have some alternative medical pre-condition. The combination of close-quarters and heightened susceptibility ultimately creates a lethal environment for the unhoused folks, in which it seems to be inevitable that they will contract COVID-19, but the chances of full recovery are significantly stunted.

Personally, we have the privilege to speak out for homeless individuals and feel that it is our duty to create and demand tangible change for this community. We see that some of these individuals are receiving vaccines but they also deserve the aftercare that deals with the [symptoms](#) of the vaccine. As citizens of Gainesville and students at the University of Florida, we are invested in the long-term health and wellness of our community. The scientific achievement of the past year should not be overshadowed by the neglect of vulnerable populations. We encourage you to support the efforts of local organizations like St. Francis House and GRACE Marketplace to ensure the safety of those experiencing houselessness. Vaccinating our unhoused neighbors not only keeps them healthy it also contributes to the collective wellbeing of Gainesville and Alachua County. We look forward to your response and support for the unhoused community.

Signed,

Amisha Patel, Sofia Beira, Elena Abbott, Rebecca Williams