

September 7, 2021

Dear Senator Brownsberger and Representative Rogers:

The FDA granting full approval to Pfizer-BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine for people 16 and over is welcome news, and should spur us into a new phase in combating COVID-19. A critical step forward will be requiring a COVID-19 vaccination for school attendance, just as we require children to receive vaccinations for measles, pertussis, diphtheria, chicken pox, and other communicable diseases. We are asking for your help in securing this by either action of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) or modifying Section 15 of chapter 76 of the Massachusetts General Laws (the law governing vaccine requirements and school attendance.)

DPH has the authority to require all students ~~ages 16 and up~~ to be immunized against COVID-19. This would be the most straightforward path forward, but the DPH has made no comments about any COVID-19 vaccine requirements. ~~We have known for months that the full FDA approval was coming.~~ We believe that DPH should have a plan to mandate the vaccine, or a clear medical and scientific rationale for why this will not happen.

If DPH does not use its authority under the law to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for school attendance, the legislature can amend Section 15 of chapter 76 of the General Laws. ~~Any change in the law should be flexible to allow for the addition of younger children as the FDA grants approval for their age groups.~~ If necessary, how soon could this legislation be introduced?

We have no time to lose. The school year has already begun. Throughout the pandemic we have seen people in all levels of government – local, state, and federal– state that the needs of children are paramount. Let us demonstrate this by taking the crucial step of requiring the COVID-19 vaccine for school attendance to protect children's health.

As always, the community of Belmont is grateful for your work on our behalf.

Sincerely,