



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

March 26, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Howard A. Zucker
Health Commissioner
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237

Re: Extending Vaccine Eligibility to All of New York City's Cultural Workers

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Zucker:

More than a year after the lights went dark on Broadway and across New York City's vast array of performance spaces, select theatres and venues are now slated to reopen in early April, a crucial step toward injecting new life into the cultural life and economy of the city.

Vaccinating our cultural workers is essential to resuscitating the arts industry, bringing tourists back to the five boroughs, and energizing the cultural economy. Altogether, our cultural sector employed more than 293,000 people and generated \$110 billion in economic activity, as I highlighted in my 2019 report *The Creative Economy*. Theatres alone support more than 12,000 jobs in New York City and attract millions of tourists. As a result of the pandemic, the arts and entertainment industry has shed more jobs than any other sector of the economy. Workers have lost wages, their jobs, and the opportunity to create art that has inspired millions. It is essential that we help get this industry back on its feet and that starts with vaccination.

Despite the cultural and economic imperative to help the arts survive this crisis and lead our recovery, not enough care has been given to ensuring that workers are protected. Workers have been forced to fight against wage retrenchments, layoffs, and cutbacks. I am proud to have worked with the New York locals of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees to help arts workers and arts organizations chart a path towards an equitable recovery.

I was encouraged by Mayor de Blasio's announcement that the City will open up a vaccine site in Times Square in the coming weeks and push to ensure performers are eligible for vaccines.

Putting on a show requires an army of dedicated workers and technicians beyond the artists you see on stage, including the scores of professionals that operate in close quarters outside of the spotlight, that may work in conditions that do not allow for social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures. To safely bring back the arts we must make sure that all these workers gain vaccine eligibility.

As theatres and event spaces begin to reopen, through the NY PopsUp program and more broadly, I urge the State to extend eligibility to the COVID-19 vaccine to all entertainment industry workers, including workers who are behind the scenes, front of house, performers and creatives alongside other industry professionals. Vaccinating these workers will both protect the health and safety of our world-class theatre professionals and reassure the public that our theaters are safe spaces to catch a show. With a phased reopening set to commence on April 2nd, it is critical that vaccine eligibility be extended to all entertainment professionals *now* so we can bring the lights back on across our cultural spaces safely.

Alongside workers involved in live productions, I urge the State to similarly extend eligibility to those involved with television, music, and motion picture production. The demands of those jobs also require close proximity. Extending eligibility to just one segment of the entertainment industry when all workers require the same protection would be short sighted. It is therefore critical that all entertainment professionals be included.

Of course, many categories of workers, from reporters to construction workers, nail salon workers to care workers, are all deserving of immediate access to the vaccine. I am pleased that supply continues to increase and am eagerly anticipating the elimination of eligibility requirements so vaccines can be offered to the population as a whole. Given the State's current approach to extending eligibility beyond the confines of our current phase, I would urge you to consider how it can best leverage new supply of the vaccine to reach those whose employment puts them at elevated risk of contracting COVID-19. A fair and equitable re-opening of our economy depends on the vaccine and I urge you to ensure our cultural economy can survive this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott M. Stringer', written in a cursive style.

Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller