

February 12, 2021

[Submitted electronically via email]

Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith  
Chair, COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force

**Re: Request for Appointment of a Pharmacist to the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force**

Dear Dr. Nunez-Smith,

On behalf of the undersigned professional pharmacy organizations representing our nation's pharmacists, congratulations on your recent appointment as Chair of the Administration's COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. We applaud the leadership that you are taking in addressing health equity and focus on patients at greater risk of getting sick and dying of COVID-19. **We are disappointed that your Task Force does not include a pharmacist. We believe that is a major omission and urge you to appoint a pharmacist to your Task Force.**

Pharmacists are critical health care team members and are embedded in communities across the country. Pharmacists consistently rank among the most trusted and ethical professionals in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> and are often the primary provider the public turns to for initial health care prevention and assistance, particularly in underserved areas. Due to the trusting relationships between pharmacists and their patients, pharmacists have ample opportunities to advance public health through immunization advocacy. Pharmacists are important members of the immunization neighborhood and that trust is important in addressing vaccine hesitancy for our nation's vulnerable minority populations. This is an invaluable asset that should be emphasized under the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force's recommendations regarding the equitable distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines. Pharmacists facilitate disease prevention strategies, because many vulnerable minority populations at higher risk for COVID-19, influenza, and pneumococcal disease visit pharmacies more frequently than any other health care setting. This existing public access, trust and relationship with pharmacists supports progress towards the vision for our nation's efforts to address health inequities.

As such, we would like you to reconsider the membership on the committee and appoint a pharmacist with experience and expertise addressing health equity. We offer three recommendations to achieve this goal. We support the appointment of:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pharmacytimes.com/news/pharmacists-remain-among-most-trusted-and-ethical-professionals>

1. Lakesha M. Butler, PharmD, BCPS, Immediate Past President of the National Pharmaceutical Association (NPhA),
  2. Vivian Bradley Johnson, Pharm.D., M.B.A., FASHP, Senior Vice President of Clinical Services at Parkland Health and Hospital System, and/or
  3. A federal government pharmacist
- to serve as a member(s) of the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force

First, Dr. Lakesha Butler is the leading expert the practice of pharmacy has come to rely upon to implement effective strategies for pharmacists to combat systemic racism and health inequity. The NPhA, established in 1947, is dedicated to representing the views and ideas of minority pharmacists on critical issues affecting healthcare and pharmacy, promoting racial and health equity, as well as advancing the standards of pharmaceutical care among all practitioners. During Dr. Butler's tenure as NPhA President, Dr. Butler led efforts uniting our national pharmacy organizations into taking action against racial inequities in pharmacy and the communities we serve.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Butler is well respected in the medical community as well. She currently serves as the sole pharmacist on the National Medical Association's (NMA) COVID-19 task force on vaccines and therapeutics. The NMA is the largest and oldest national organization representing African American physicians and their patients in the United States. This task force is comprised of Black healthcare professionals (physicians and "pharmacist") independently vetting vaccine candidates and therapeutics. Recently, NMA has begun collaborative efforts with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in recommending a distribution plan for the vaccine targeting minoritized communities. The NMA task force is simultaneously vetting vaccines, educating minority communities about the available vaccines and developing strategies to facilitate equitable distribution.

Dr. Butler established "Deconstructing Systemic Racism: Addressing Social Determinants of Health in Pharmacy," an educational session for the entire practice of pharmacy, where she led a public discussion about racial inequity and systemic racism and how pharmacists and pharmacy staff can recognize scenarios and implement strategies to actively combat racism, including understanding social determinants of health. She also recently co-authored the manuscript "Systemic Racism: Pharmacists' Role and Responsibility," which discusses the importance of organizations strengthening their advocacy efforts pertaining to health equity.

Dr. Butler is the CEO and Founder of Dr. Lakesha Butler, LLC-Disrupting the Status Quo, where she provides strategies on how to address racial and health inequities to healthcare organizations and higher education institutions.

Dr. Butler is also the sole clinical pharmacist providing medication management services at the Volunteers in Medicine Clinic, a clinic that serves uninsured patients of St. Louis, Missouri. As a professor at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), Dr. Butler has developed and coordinates a required pharmacy graduate level course that addresses health disparities, health beliefs, health literacy, and cultural competency. She is the creator of the first and only Health Literacy instructional DVD teaching tool for pharmacy students and pharmacists across the

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<sup>2</sup>[https://nationalpharmaceuticalassociation.org/resources/Documents/Pharmacists\\_RacialInjustice\\_V2.pdf](https://nationalpharmaceuticalassociation.org/resources/Documents/Pharmacists_RacialInjustice_V2.pdf)

nation and co-author of the pharmacy textbook “Patient Communication for Pharmacy: A Case-Study Approach on Theory and Practice.” She also currently serves as the School of Pharmacy Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Chair of the School of Pharmacy’s Diversity and Inclusion committee and the Director of the SIUE Healthcare Diversity Summer Camp which exposes minority high school students to college life and careers in healthcare.<sup>3</sup> Within her community, Dr. Butler was also recently appointed to the Francis Howell School District Equity Steering Committee by the district superintendent. They are tasked with providing guidance on how to improve the district's collective equity and inclusion efforts in hiring, curriculum, professional development and other areas.

Second, Dr. Vivian Bradley Johnson oversees a \$300 million budget and 1,500 employees engaged in the fight against COVID-19 across Pharmacy, Radiology, Respiratory, Clinical Dietary, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation and Laboratory Services at Parkland Health and Hospital System, one of the largest public hospital systems in the United States. She is a leader in engaging communities of color around COVID-19 vaccination and testing in Dallas, Texas.

Dr. Bradley Johnson is a clinical pharmacist by training and has dedicated the past 35 years of her career to providing healthcare services to underserved individuals in Dallas County. It is through this experience that she has established a deep understanding of medication use and supply chain challenges impacting our nation’s COVID-19 response.

Under Dr. Bradley Johnson’s leadership, Parkland has partnered with Dallas County Health and Human Services to respond to the Community Health Needs Assessment to identify the geographic areas and populations that experience the most significant health disparities. She also helped to establish strategies for addressing access to care, understanding the health needs of special populations, and the need for collaborative action to impact socio-economic factors that contribute to poor health outcomes among at-risk populations. Dr. Bradley Johnson’s team is also addressing COVID-19 by providing critical care to severely ill COVID-19 patients, providing access to COVID-19 vaccination and testing, setting up a COVID-19 follow-up clinic for patients with additional needs, and creating a toolkit for schools in Dallas County to utilize to re-open safely.

Dr. Bradley Johnson has personally served as an ambassador to her community and Parkland’s patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. She has been actively engaged in outreach to the Dallas community focused on expanding community members’ understanding of COVID-19 vaccination with a focus on improving the acceptance of the vaccine in Black and Brown communities. She partnered with Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce, the Dallas Mavericks, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and local churches to educate on how to access vaccinations and support the small business community’s response to COVID-19. Additionally, at the request of Congressman Collin Allred and Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, she has participated as a panelist in town hall discussions to educate their constituents about COVID-19 and opportunities for vaccination.

Third, pharmacists throughout the federal government serve in positions that provide them with insights and experience improving the health of racial and ethnic populations and addressing

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nationalpharmaceuticalassociation.org/AdministrativeOfficers>

health inequities. Whether it is boots on the ground experience working within communities and/or through administration of government programs, we are aware of highly skilled and knowledgeable federal pharmacists who will be excellent in representing the perspectives of pharmacists and pharmacy and be asset on the Task Force.

**Thank you for considering adding pharmacists to the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force and considering the pharmacy profession's nomination of Dr. Lakesha Butler, Dr. Vivian Bradley Johnson, and/or a federal government pharmacist.**

We have attached Dr. Butler and Dr. Bradley Johnson's recent curricula vitae, which include their contact information. Thank you for your service and leadership driving change and making a difference during this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Lucinda L. Maine, Ph.D., R.Ph.  
Executive Vice President and CEO  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP)

Susan Bartlemay, RPh, FACA, FAPhA  
Executive Vice President  
American College of Apothecaries (ACA)

Michael S. Maddux, PharmD, FCCP  
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Janet P. Engle, PharmD, PhD (Hon), FAPhA, FCCP, FNAP  
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Paul W. Abramowitz, PharmD, Sc.D. (Hon), FASHP  
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Brenda K. Schimenti  
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The College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)

Anne Krolikowski, CAE  
Executive Director  
Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association (HOPA)

Lemrey “Al” Carter, MS, PharmD, RPh  
Executive Director  
The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP)

Rebecca Snead, RPh  
Executive Vice President and CEO  
National Association of State Pharmacy Associations (NASPA)

Douglas Hoey, RPh, MBA, FACA  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA)

Ryan C. Marable, PharmD, RPh  
President  
National Pharmaceutical Association (NPhA)

Enclosure:  
Curricula Vitae (CV)/Résumé  
Lakesha M. Butler, PharmD, BCPS

Curricula Vitae (CV)/Résumé  
Vivian Bradley Johnson, Pharm.D., M.B.A., FASHP