



February 23, 2021

Guy Bailey, President
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
1201 W University Drive
Edinburg, TX 78539

Dear President Bailey,

We write as Senior Counsel and Regional Director of Policy and Advocacy for LatinoJustice PRLDEF requesting that you publicly clarify the UT Rio Grande Valley (“UTRGV”) policy regarding vaccination of otherwise eligible individuals who are undocumented.

On February 20, 2021, Abe Díaz posted on Twitter that his father, who is over sixty and has underlying health conditions (which would qualify him in group 1B for vaccination) was denied a vaccine “[because he’s undocumented](#).” Through its official account, UTRGV responded that it learned that it “did not follow the most current State of Texas guidelines that all eligible patients, [despite their place of residence](#), be administered a COVID-19 Vaccine.”

LatinoJustice is deeply concerned about this incident and what appears to be an unsatisfactory response by the university. An individual’s “place of residence” is not synonymous with immigration status: people who live and work in the Rio Grande Valley reside there regardless of whether they are documented.

President Biden’s National Strategy for the Covid-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness has emphasized that vaccines should be distributed to members of the U.S. public “[regardless of their immigration status](#).” And in [a recent radio interview](#), Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, emphasized that immigration status is not and should not be a barrier to receiving the vaccine.

UTRGV plainly recognizes the importance of encouraging members of the public to obtain the safe and effective vaccines when they are eligible. It announces the benefits of the vaccine and FAQs that dispel patient concerns on its [website](#). But by denying the vaccine to undocumented Americans, and issuing a public statement that does not directly state that immigration status is not a barrier to obtaining a vaccine, UTRGV is discouraging eligible individuals from obtaining a vaccine and endangering public health.

LatinoJustice thereby calls upon UTRGV to take the following steps to ensure that members of the public know that immigration status is not a barrier to vaccination:

- Issue a public statement, in English and in Spanish, clarifying that eligible individuals will not be turned away from vaccination sites based on immigration status;
- Create an education campaign in Spanish stating that immigration status is not a barrier to obtaining a vaccine, including airing information on Spanish-language radio and adding FAQ to the UTRGV website;



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- Instruct the personnel conducting vaccinations at UTRGV that immigration status is not a barrier to obtaining the vaccine, emphasizing them not to ask about immigration status or to turn away otherwise eligible individuals based on immigration status.

We are available to discuss these issues with you or a member of your staff at any time.
Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Jorge Renaud, Regional Director of Policy and Advocacy, Southwest Region

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LatinoJustice PRLDEF

cc: John H. Krouse, MD, PhD, MBA
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Executive Vice President, Health Affairs

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