

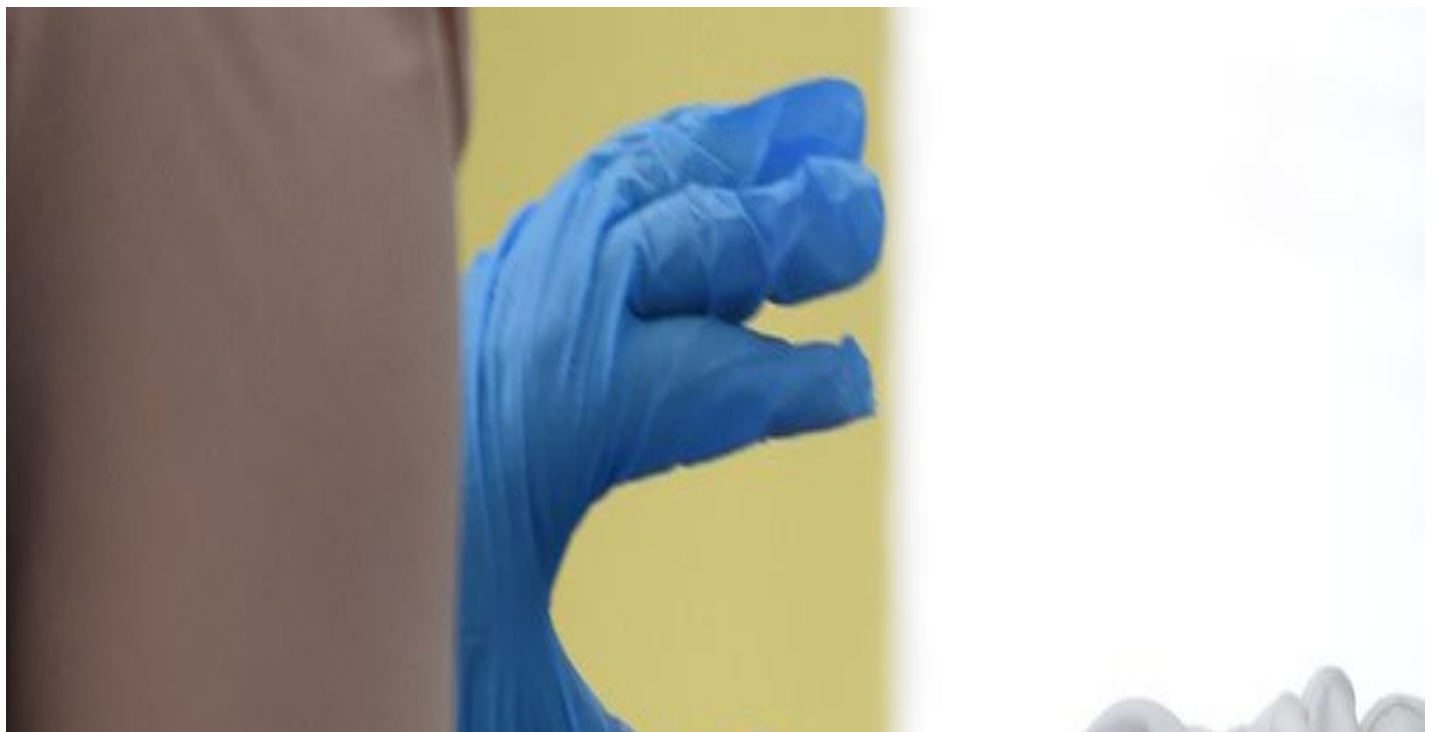
CORONAVIRUS

# Connecticut organizations allege Lamont's age-based COVID-19 vaccine rollout discriminates against Black and brown residents

By EMILY BRINDLEY

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In this Feb. 16 photo, a Black man receives Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at The First Cathedral Church in Hartford. (Brad Horrigan/The Hartford Courant)

Legal Aid lawyers have filed a civil rights complaint against Gov. Ned Lamont and the state of Connecticut, claiming that the state's new age-based rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines is discriminatory against the state's nonwhite residents.

The complaint by three Legal Aid associations argues that Connecticut's residents of color are disproportionately represented in the categories of frontline essential workers and people with underlying health conditions. Both of those groups were originally slated to be prioritized for vaccination, until Lamont switched to an age-based rollout.

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“All of these factors contribute to Black and brown Connecticut residents contracting COVID-19 at higher rates, and dying of it at higher rates,” said Kristen Noelle Miller Hatcher, an attorney with Connecticut Legal Services, in a release. “In fact, in [Connecticut] Black and brown people are dying younger when they contract COVID-19, making it even more critical that the allocation of the vaccine not be done simply by age, and that they need to instead prioritize people with underlying conditions and with high risks of exposure.”

When asked at a Monday press briefing about the claim that the new plan discriminates against people of color, Lamont said simply, “I think it’s false.”

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**Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont receives his first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at The First Cathedral church Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021, in Bloomfield, Conn. Administering the vaccine is St. Francis Hospital registered nurse Patrice Marriott. (Brad Horrigan/Hartford Courant via AP) (Brad Horrigan/AP)**

Three organizations — Connecticut Legal Services, the New Haven Legal Assistance Association and the Greater Hartford Legal Aid Association — filed the complaint on Monday in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights, which is in Washington, D.C.

The complaint requests that the Office for Civil Rights both investigate the Lamont administration for racial discrimination, and direct the administration to immediately prioritize frontline essential workers and residents with underlying conditions for vaccination.

Under Connecticut's original plan, those two groups were prioritized for vaccination. But on Feb. 22, Lamont announced a new plan, which would proceed based only on age (with the exception of educators).

The new plan runs counter to guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and has garnered criticism from disability rights advocates and unions representing frontline essential workers such as grocery store workers.

Monday's civil rights complaint is the second filed against the governor's age-based vaccination plan. The nonprofit organization Disability Rights Connecticut at the end of February [filed a similar complaint](#), claiming that the governor's plan discriminates against people with disabilities.

Despite the criticism, Lamont has given no indication that he's considering a reversal.

“Our rollout is simple but it's also based upon public health,” Lamont said. “And it says that those who are most likely to be infected, most likely to suffer complications, most likely to die are going to be the ones that get vaccinated first — and that's based on age.”



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Since announcing the plan two weeks ago, the governor's administration has repeatedly underscored its simplicity, which officials say will help the state vaccinate residents more quickly. State officials have also said that they will prioritize equity alongside speed, although [an equity-focused memo](#) from the state to vaccine providers offered little in the way of concrete guidance.

The newly filed civil rights complaint pushes back against the Lamont administration's claim that the age-based plan will achieve both speed and equity.

"The Governor prioritized simplicity in the plan, and he put aside the guidance of all the experts," the complaint says. "This new policy ... exclusively promotes simplicity and ease of administration over equity concerns founded on well-established data showing that Connecticut's Black and brown residents are disproportionately negatively impacted by COVID-19 and more likely to contract the virus and to die from the virus."

[Feb. 25: Disability Rights Connecticut files federal civil rights complaint claiming state's age-based plan for COVID-19 vaccinations is discriminatory »](#)

In addition to residents of color being more likely to work frontline jobs and more likely to have underlying conditions, Black residents in particular are significantly less likely to have received a COVID-19 vaccine, according to state data.

Health equity advocates and public health officials [have said](#) that the vaccination disparity, while partially influenced by vaccine hesitancy in communities of color, is mostly a result of a lack of access.

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Emily Brindley covers the coronavirus pandemic — and sometimes other things, too. In pre-pandemic times, she worked on The Courant's breaking and community news team, covering West Hartford and the Farmington Valley. Before joining The Courant, Emily graduated from the University of Pittsburgh and worked as a town reporter at the Journal Inquirer.

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