

*26 Democrats ask President  
Biden to expand vaccine  
cooperation with Cuba*

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Washington, June 16 (RHC)--A group of House Democrats is urging the Biden administration to further soften sanctions against Cuba to aid the distribution of the Caribbean nation's COVID-19 vaccines worldwide.

According to the digital newspaper The Hill, the request was sent in a letter led by Reps. Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.) and Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.). In the text, the lawmakers praised President Biden's loosening of travel and remittance restrictions to the island and asked for bilateral cooperation on public health.

"As an initial step, we ask that you review U.S. policy towards Cuba in order to facilitate greater global vaccine equity, with a particular focus on ensuring that U.S. sanctions do not impede current or future efforts by Cuba to share COVID-19 vaccines and related technology and medical support with low-income countries around the world," they wrote.

"We agree with your administration's approach that seeks to 'address the humanitarian situation and respond to the needs of the Cuban people,'" wrote the lawmakers.

The Democrats' appeal also rests on the need for COVID-19 vaccinations for low-income countries that either cannot afford vaccines that have become widespread in richer countries or where conditions make it difficult to widely distribute vaccines that require special care, like refrigeration.

"While over 75 percent of people in high-income countries have received at least one dose, only 10 percent of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose," wrote the lawmakers.

The Hill noted that Cuba, despite its economic limitations, has historically punched above its weight in public health policy.

The Caribbean nation has a COVID-19 vaccination rate of more than 90 percent, despite limitations on importing precursors and equipment to develop its own vaccination program.

The lawmakers said the Cuban vaccines, produced at reduced cost with limited infrastructure, could assist the Biden administration's goal to distribute cheap and effective vaccines worldwide.

"U.S. sanctions on Cuba directly impede these goals, not only by harming the country's ability to vaccinate its own population but also by placing obstacles in the way of Cuba's ability to produce and distribute its vaccine to other countries that continue to face shortages," wrote the Democrats.

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