

Disability Rights Connecticut files federal civil rights complaint claiming state's age-based plan for COVID-19 vaccinations is discriminatory

By EMILY BRINDLEY

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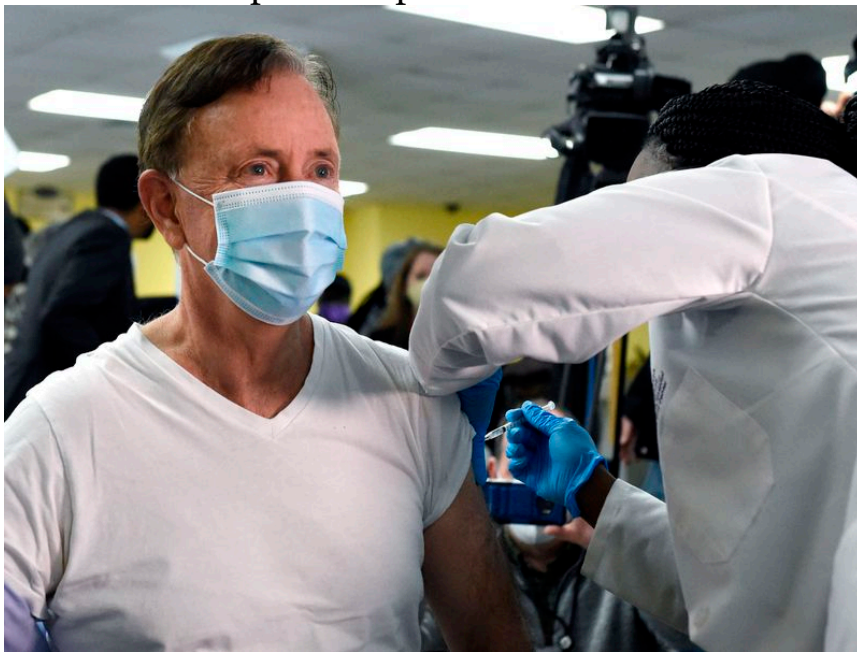


In this Feb. 9 photo, a resident receives the COVID-19 vaccination at the Community Health Center, Inc. vaccination clinic at the old Pratt & Whitney Airport runway near East Hartford's Rentschler Field. (Kassi Jackson/Kassi Jackson)

The nonprofit organization Disability Rights Connecticut has filed a federal civil rights complaint against the state of Connecticut, claiming that Gov. Ned Lamont's new age-based COVID-19 vaccine rollout discriminates against people with underlying conditions, including some people with disabilities. Lamont on Monday pivoted from his previous rollout plan, which would prioritized residents based on a combination of age and other risk factors. The state will now vaccinate residents based on age, with an exception for school employees who can sign up for vaccinations starting March 1.

[Connecticut's new COVID-19 vaccine plan is meant to prioritize speed and equity. But experts are divided on whether the new strategy will accomplish those goals »](#)

Connecticut's new plan is a rejection of the guidance handed down by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lamont and his top aides have said the CDC guidance was too complex and have emphasized the simplicity of their plan, which could make the rollout move more quickly than it would have under the previous plan.



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)

But new complaint claims that age-based prioritization is discriminatory against people with disabilities, both because it does not address the increased risk that COVID-19 poses for people with underlying conditions and because it does not include a process by which people with disabilities can request an exception.

Deborah Dorfman, executive director of Disability Rights Connecticut, said in a release that the new rollout plan is “the latest disturbing example” of discrimination against people with disabilities.

“Connecticut’s new policy has apparently been developed in the belief that it would be easier to administer. But merely because it may be easier does not make it right,” Dorfman said. “And this policy is not only an outlier nationally, it blatantly disregards CDC policy guidelines, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the rights of individuals with disabilities.”



The governor’s office declined to comment on the complaint.

[Under Lamont’s new COVID-19 vaccination plan for Connecticut, people with high-risk medical conditions and essential workers have lost their place in line »](#)

The complaint, filed with U.S. Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, focuses particularly on younger people with underlying conditions. Those people were next in line for vaccinations under the old plan, but will now have to wait until at least May under the new plan.

“The state has now put more than 1 million people ahead of individuals in their 20’s or early 30’s, for example, who have a disability that would have made them eligible to receive a vaccination just days from now,” Dorfman said. “These are individuals who were previously told they would be eligible to receive a vaccine as soon as next week. Now it will be May at the earliest, and quite possibly considerably longer.”

Emily Brindley can be reached at ebrindley@courant.com.



Emily Brindley

Hartford Courant

CONTACT

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.