



International Association of Fire Chiefs

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September 4, 2020

Dr. William Foege, MD, MPH
Co-Chair
Committee on the Equitable Allocation of
COVID-19 Vaccine
National Academy of Science
2101 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20418

Dr. Helene Gayle, MD, MPH
Co-Chair
Committee on the Equitable Allocation of
COVID-19 Vaccine
National Academy of Science
2101 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20418

Dear Dr. Foege and Dr. Gayle:

On behalf of the more than 13,000 chief fire and emergency medical services (EMS) officers of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), I applaud the Committee on the Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine (the Committee) for its decision to place all firefighters and EMS personnel in Tier 1A for access to a future COVID-19 vaccination. As America's all-hazard emergency responders, career and volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel must be prioritized for protections against the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its ensuing illness, COVID-19. The Committee's decision to prioritize fire and EMS personnel for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine will enable these brave men and women to continue caring for COVID-19 patients, among other critically ill and injured patients, as well as responding to routine emergencies, natural disasters, and acts of terrorism. As the Committee finalizes its recommendations, the IAFC urges the Committee to retain the placement of all firefighters and EMS personnel within Priority Tier 1A and to encourage all states to adopt the same prioritization scheduling.

As you know, fire departments and EMS agencies are an important piece of the healthcare system and provide pre-hospital emergency medical care and transportation to ill and injured patients. Each year, more than 30 million patients enter the healthcare system through an ambulance. COVID-19 patients are no exception. Firefighters and EMS personnel place themselves in harm's way when caring for COVID-19 patients in uncontrolled environments like a patient's home or in a moving ambulance. Protecting firefighters and EMS personnel is even more difficult since a patient's COVID-19 status may be unknown in the field. As a result, firefighters and EMS personnel must treat all patients as COVID-19 positive, because any lapses or complacency in infection control procedures could have deadly consequences.

Beyond their role as EMS providers, firefighters also face significant risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 during other emergency responses such as extricating victims from car accidents or rescuing them from fires, natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other emergencies. In fact, the first firefighters to die from COVID-19 contracted it from a homeowner when

responding to a reported gas leak. Firefighters' close and sustained contact with the public puts them at unquestionable risk of contracting the SARS-CoV-2 virus and COVID-19.

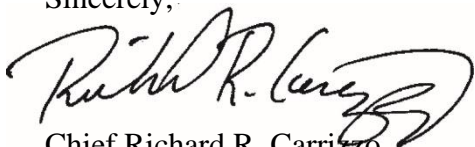
Sadly, fire departments and EMS agencies still face chronic challenges in protecting their personnel due to earlier decisions by federal and state government agencies to de-prioritize their access to COVID-19 testing and personal protective equipment (PPE). While some of these PPE and testing access issues are slowly improving, only a vaccine can provide the complete protection that firefighters and EMS personnel need. The IAFC sincerely appreciates the Committee's commitment to protecting first responders and its decision to place all firefighters and EMS personnel in Tier 1A for access to a COVID-19 vaccine.

In addition to prioritizing firefighters and EMS personnel for access to a COVID-19 vaccine, the IAFC urges the National Academies to recommend that all states adopt the National Academies' prioritization scheduling. The IAFC is aware of some states that de-prioritized fire departments for access to COVID-19 PPE and testing. Similar state-level deviations should not be permitted when it comes to providing vaccines to fire and EMS personnel. Responses to natural disasters and acts of terrorism frequently require interstate mutual aid responses. A uniform, nationwide prioritization strategy would allow firefighters and EMS personnel to engage in these responses without confusion about who is vaccinated and who is unprotected.

Lastly, the IAFC recommends that the National Academies consider the role that fire departments could play in administering the COVID-19 vaccine to the public. Fire and EMS personnel in many cities already are facilitating COVID-19 testing. Many fire departments are using their personnel to provide walk-up and drive-thru testing in fire stations as well as routine testing of staff and residents in long-term care facilities. The strategic locations of fire stations and the advanced medical training of firefighters and EMS personnel make them logical partners in administering a vaccine to the public. Mass administration of a COVID-19 vaccine will undoubtedly be a difficult task. America's fire and emergency service could assist in this mission by relying on their pre-existing, strategically-located positions as well as serving as a recognized and trusted source of health information in many communities.

On behalf of the leadership of more than one million firefighters and EMS personnel across the United States, I would like to sincerely thank you for your decision to protect America's firefighters and EMS personnel by granting them prioritized access to the COVID-19 vaccination. The decision to place firefighters and EMS personnel in Priority Tier 1A will undoubtedly save the lives of both first responders as well as members of the public by allowing our firefighters and EMS personnel to remain healthy and ready to respond to emergencies. The IAFC stands ready and willing to assist the National Academies in further developing their plans to administer COVID-19 vaccines to the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard R. Carrizzo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Chief Richard R. Carrizzo
President and Chairman of the Board