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Jose Romero, MD, FAAP
Chair
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road, NE
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Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Chairman Romero,

On behalf of the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT), thank you for the opportunity to provide comments as your Committee meets to discuss and vote on COVID-19 vaccine recommendations.

Formed in 1975 and more than 72,000 members strong, the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT) is the only national association representing the professional interests of all emergency and mobile healthcare practitioners, including emergency medical technicians, advanced emergency medical technicians, emergency medical responders, paramedics, advanced practice paramedics, critical care paramedics, flight paramedics, community paramedics, and mobile integrated healthcare practitioners. NAEMT members work in all sectors of emergency medical services (EMS), including government agencies, fire departments, hospital-based ambulance services, private companies, industrial and special operations settings, and in the military. NAEMT membership constitutes paramedics (53%), EMTs (38%), and physicians, nurses and other prehospital medical professionals (9%).

We respectfully urge your Committee to ensure that emergency medical services (EMS) personnel are placed on the highest priority tier for receiving COVID-19 vaccinations when they are available. America's first responders are serving bravely as the tip of the spear in the battle against the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its resulting illness, COVID-19. First responders are placing themselves in immediate danger of contracting the virus while they care for COVID-19 patients. This danger is evident in the fact that nearly 60 EMS practitioners and firefighters have died after contracting COVID-19 and thousands more have become ill, and/or been placed in quarantine or isolation. It is imperative that our first responders are afforded every possible protection and vaccinations are a critical component to that protection.

As you are well aware, 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 and COVID-19 patients are no exception. EMS personnel place themselves in harm's way when caring for COVID-19 patients in

uncontrolled environments like a patient's home or in an ambulance. Protecting EMS personnel is all the more difficult since a patient's COVID-19 status may be unknown in the field. As a result, EMS personnel must treat all patients as potentially COVID-19 positive as any lapses or complacency in infection control procedures could have serious consequences.

The reality is that EMS agencies still face chronic challenges in protecting their personnel due to earlier decisions by federal and state government agencies to de-prioritize EMS agency access to COVID-19 testing and personal protective equipment (PPE). Many of these issues stem from failures to recognize the importance of pre-hospital EMS and the artificial discrepancy that was made by excluding EMS personnel from the prioritized protections and testing afforded to in-facility healthcare workers. The failure to prioritize EMS personnel along with other healthcare workers cannot be repeated.

As the federal government implements Operation Warp Speed and develops a vaccine distribution strategy, EMS personnel must be included in the highest priority tier. It is critical that our nation's first responders are protected in order to maintain their readiness to respond to future waves of COVID-19, "routine" emergencies, and major incidents such as natural disasters and acts of terrorism. As the representative of EMS personnel across the United States, we urge you to take decisive action to protect our nation's protectors. Ensuring EMS personnel have prioritized access to vaccinations is vital to remaining prepared for any biological, natural, or man-made emergency which we might face.

NAEMT looks forward to continuing to work with you to develop plans and policies to ensure an efficient response to the COVID-19 public health emergency while also protecting EMS personnel who serve on the front lines each and every day.

Sincerely,



Matt Zavatsky, MS-HSA, NREMT
President, NAEMT

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