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January 29, 2021

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Chair,
The Honorable Asa Hutchinson, Vice Chair
National Governors Association
444 North Capitol Street, Suite 267
Washington, D.C. 20001

RE: COVID-19 Vaccination for Water and Wastewater Workers

Dear Governors Cuomo and Hutchinson:

As States develop and implement their plans for distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Water Environment Federation (WEF) asks that all frontline water and wastewater utility staff members receive priority in Phase 1C. This phase includes “frontline essential workers as the subset of essential workers likely at greatest risk for work-related exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, because their work-related duties must be performed on site and involve being in close contact (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more) to the public or coworkers,” as described in the January 2021 Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) *COVID-19 Vaccination Program Interim Playbook for Jurisdictions Operations Annex*.

Vaccinating frontline water and wastewater utility staff members and contracted personnel is particularly important because water and wastewater sector services underpin all aspects of society, including hospitals, medical centers, and long-term care facilities. Due to the specialized skills and licenses required for utility operations and the corresponding challenges in finding replacements for staff members who may become ill or exposed, it is essential to mitigate staff members’ COVID-19 risks through all possible means, including vaccinations.

The importance of protecting water and wastewater workers was established early in the COVID-19 crisis. In a March 27, 2020, letter to Governors, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requested “that water and wastewater workers, as well as the manufacturers and suppliers who provide vital services and materials to the water sector, are considered essential workers and businesses by state authorities when enacting restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19.” An August 18, 2020, Advisory Memorandum from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security reinforced the importance of water and wastewater workers as members of the “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce” advisory list.

WEF understands the challenges States continue to have combating the spread of the virus and maintaining community and economic stability, which is why we request Governors to prioritize vaccine eligibility to water and wastewater workers in Phases 1B and 1C. Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss vaccine prioritization our nation's water and wastewater workers.

Sincerely,

Walter T. Marlowe, P.E., CAE
Executive Director
Water Environment Federation

CC:

The Honorable Ned Lamont, Co-Chair, Pandemic & Disaster Response Task Force, National Governors Association

The Honorable Bill Lee, Co-Chair, Pandemic & Disaster Response Task Force, National Governors Association

Mr. Bill McBride, Executive Director, National Governors Association