



January 29, 2021

Jose Romero, MD
Chair
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Mailstop A27
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Dr. Romero,

On behalf of the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense, we commend the recent efforts of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to prioritize the first responder community in Phase 1b of the Committee's COVID-19 vaccine allocation recommendations. We strongly support ACIP's ongoing efforts to develop guidance regarding vaccines and immunization practices to counter biological threats.

Established in 2014, the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense comprehensively assesses the state of our country's biodefense efforts and makes recommendations to strengthen the Nation's ability to defend against naturally occurring infectious diseases, accidents involving biological agents, and biological attacks. The Commission is bipartisan. Former Senator Joe Lieberman and former Governor Tom Ridge serve as co-chairs and are joined by former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, former Representative Jim Greenwood, former Homeland Security Advisor Ken Wainstein, and former Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor Lisa Monaco.

The Nation's police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical service providers play a critical role in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from biological events. These and other first responders form the first line of biodefense in our communities. During a biological event, first responders continue to respond to other emergencies, care for the ill, and protect their communities while putting their own health and safety at greater risk.

ACIP plays a key role in protecting the Nation's first responders as they address today's COVID-19 pandemic and future biological threats. To ensure first responders can effectively protect our communities, we recommend that ACIP build on the momentum that began with the December 2020 updates to its COVID-19 interim vaccine allocation recommendations. **First and foremost, we recommend the inclusion of first responder organizations as non-voting liaison representative ACIP members to help ensure the first responder perspective is included in future guidelines and messaging.** We also believe that ACIP should take the following actions to strengthen the first responder community's ability to respond during biological events

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Continue to Prioritize First Responders for Vaccination

If first responders are unable to perform their duties, particularly in the face of a biological threat, the safety and health of our communities will suffer. First responders must make difficult decisions that

could affect their health and the health of their families. Some first responders will continue to work despite infection because of the criticality of their job. This increases the risk to our communities of exposure. Making vaccines more readily available to first responders could reduce the stress and anxiety they experience during biological events.

Further, prioritizing first responders will not drastically impact the ability of other groups and populations to get vaccinated. For example, an estimated 4.6 million people serve as career first responders. This is in comparison to the estimated 54 million people over the age of 65 in the United States, a group that was prioritized over first responders for vaccination by some states. First responders are a comparatively small population that can provide additional care and safety to their communities once vaccinated. **We recommend that ACIP continue take first responders into specific consideration and prioritize them highly when issuing its recommendations about all vaccines.**

Provide First Responders with the Information and Recommendations They Need to Make Informed Decisions about Immunization

Our first responders require consistent information about threats and available vaccines when making decisions about how to safely protect our communities during biological events. Ensuring vaccine information comes from trusted sources will also reassure skeptical citizens and first responders that the vaccines in question resulted from scientifically rigorous research and development. Information sharing about vaccines should be coordinated across state, local, tribal, territorial, and national levels to ensure that messaging is cohesive.

The Commission appreciates guidance provided by ACIP and believes that including first responders within Phase 1b of COVID-19 vaccine distribution is critical to our country's response to the pandemic. Issuing clear materials and guidance that detail the impact and benefit of immunizing first responders will help ensure this and any other vaccination distribution strategy is effectively and consistently implemented throughout the country.

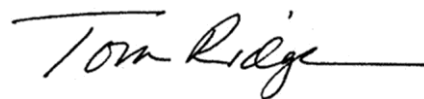
COVID-19 is not the only biological threat with which the Nation must concern itself. Biological agents (e.g., anthrax and smallpox) that have been weaponized and used for biological terrorism and warfare are of grave concern and continue to threaten the Nation. It is imperative that as first responders receive information and intelligence about biological threats, they also get information about vaccines that could provide them with immunity against the diseases these threats could produce. **We recommend that when new and safer vaccines become available that ACIP takes special care to advise first responders about them, so that they can make the best, most informed decisions about immunization.**

Thank you again for your efforts to prioritize first responders for vaccinations. We applaud your leadership on this issue and look forward to working together to ensure our Nation is prepared and can effectively respond to current and future biological threats. Should you have any questions, please contact Dr. Asha M. George, Executive Director of the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense, at Asha.George@biodefensecommission.org.

Sincerely,



Joseph I. Lieberman
Co-Chair



Thomas J. Ridge
Co-Chair