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Dear Dr. Foege and Dr. Gayle,

On behalf of the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT), thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's discussion draft on the preliminary framework to assist policymakers in planning for equitable allocation of a vaccine against COVID-19. We were *extremely* pleased the Committee included *all* EMS personnel in the highest priority tier for access to the vaccine.

During the pandemic, many EMS practitioners also faced challenges going home to their immediate family members out of the fear of potentially exposing those immediate family members to COVID-19. Therefore, we'd recommend adding **immediate family members** to the first responder and front-line healthcare worker tier.

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%).

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Since the beginning of the pandemic, NAEMT has been strongly urging the Administration and Congress to ensure that EMS personnel are placed in the highest priority tier for receiving COVID-19 vaccinations when they are available. Similarly, as stated in your preliminary draft framework, 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 firefighters and EMS personnel have died after contracting COVID-19 and thousands more have 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 aware, EMS agencies are an important component 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.

Sadly, 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 representatives of EMS personnel across the United States, thank you for your preliminary recommendations to protect EMS personnel, we wholeheartedly agree. 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.

Sincerely,



Matt Zavadsky, MS-HSA, NREMT
President, NAEMT