



To: Dr. Deidre Gifford, Acting Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Public Health and Dr. Reginald J. Eadie, President and CEO of Trinity Health of New England, Co-Chairs, COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Group

From: Elizabeth Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Water Works Association

Date: January 11, 2021

Re: Connecticut COVID-19 Vaccination Distribution Plan – Essential Water Sector Employees

The Connecticut Water Works Association (CWNA), which represents municipal, private and regional water utilities throughout Connecticut, urges the COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Group to recognize the importance of including essential water sector workers in Phase 1B of the COVID-19 vaccination schedule.

Safe, reliable drinking water is critical to protecting the public health and safety of residents, businesses, hospitals, health care facilities, and other institutions. Public water supplies are also relied on by a wide range of businesses to maintain operations, which is critical to the state's economic recovery efforts. From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Connecticut's water utilities have worked tirelessly to ensure that residents and businesses could rely on safe, high quality public water supplies without interruption.

Connecticut's water utilities recognize that they have an obligation to continue to provide water to sustain public health and protect public safety, and support communities and businesses, no matter what. Recognizing the importance of minimizing the exposure of essential water utility workers to COVID-19, water utilities have strictly adhered to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) guidelines and the state Department of Economic and Community Development's Safe Workplace Rules for Essential Employers. This has required water utilities to stagger shifts for essential water sector employees, isolate field staff and certified water operators, restrict travel and require non-essential employees to work remotely.

Given the limited availability of certified water treatment operators and other qualified essential water sector employees and concerns regarding the risk of transmission to employees and their household family members who are older or who have underlying health issues, this has placed a significant strain on the availability of our workforce. Unfortunately, due to the specialized skills, certifications, and licenses required to perform various water utility operations and the sizeable number of retirements in the industry, it has proven extremely difficult to find replacement staff if essential workers become ill or test positive for COVID-19.

Accordingly, the state must take steps to protect our certified water operators and other essential water sector employees from COVID -19 to ensure the continued availability of public water supplies needed for public health and safety, as well as to support businesses and communities. To mitigate these concerns, Connecticut should ensure that essential water sector employees are eligible to be vaccinated under Phase 1B.

Please contact me at 860-841-7350 if you would like to discuss further.

We appreciate your consideration.