



September 4, 2020

National Academies Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine  
500 Fifth St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: Include Funeral Directors in Top-Tier Essential Services for COVID-19 Vaccine

Dear NASEM:

Due to the high risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus, the New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association, a 501(c)(6) organization representing 925 licensed funeral director members, urges you to include funeral home personnel in the top-tier of essential services to receive a COVID-19 vaccine when and if it becomes available.

As an essential service, exposure of funeral home personnel to COVID-19 can adversely affect every state's post-mortem operation. Deathcare professionals are at high-risk for exposure to COVID-19 as they enter hospitals, nursing homes, and residences to take the body of a decedent into their care; as they meet with surviving family members who may have been exposed to the coronavirus; and as they prepare the bodies of pandemic victims for burial or cremation.

In 2008, during the H1N1 pandemic, the CDC elevated "Mortuary Service Providers" to Tier II for vaccine prioritization, with the most critical workers and personnel in Tiers I, II, and III. During the current pandemic, the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency issued guidance on March 19, 2020 classifying mortuary workers as "critical infrastructure workers" in the "Healthcare and Public Health" category along with doctors and nurses.

Placing funeral home personnel high in your vaccine prioritization protects the health not only of funeral home personnel, but the entire community in which they work.

On behalf of our membership and in the interest of ensuring uninterrupted and efficient post-mortem operations, we urge your thoughtful consideration and consensus on including funeral home personnel in the top-tier of essential services to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Althea D. Ford", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Althea D. Ford  
Director of Government Relations