

American Fire Sprinkler Association/Congressional Fire Services Institute/Cumberland Valley Volunteer Firemen's Association/
Fire Apparatus Manufacturers' Association/Fire Department Safety Officers Association/
Fire and Emergency Manufacturers and Services Association/Firehouse Magazine/Institution of Fire Engineers – USA Branch/
International Association of Arson Investigators/International Association of Fire Chiefs/
International Association of Fire Fighters/International Association of Wildland Fire/International Code Council/
ICC Fire Service Membership Council/International Fire Buff Associates/
International Fire Marshals Association/International Fire Service Training Association/
International Municipal Signal Association/International Society of Fire Service Instructors/
National Association of State Fire Marshals/National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications/
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation/National Fire Protection Association/National Fire Sprinkler Association/
National Volunteer Fire Council/North American Fire Training Directors/Underwriters Laboratories/VFIS

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington DC, 20500

Dear Vice President Pence,

As the leader of the White House's Coronavirus Task Force, we write to you today to draw your attention to the needs of America's fire and emergency services personnel in the face of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Across the country, firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and paramedics are on the front lines battling COVID-19 and it is critical that they have the supplies and resources needed to preserve their safety as they work to ensure the health and safety of their communities. As the Task Force continues to coordinate the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask you to address the following needs of the fire and emergency services:

Fire and Emergency Services Personnel Need Personal Protective Equipment

In particular, we want to underscore the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) for fire and emergency services personnel, including N95 masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection. There is a national PPE shortage. Many fire and EMS departments are being told by regular suppliers not to expect resupply for months. As COVID-19 continues to spread in the United States, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics are increasingly responding to COVID-19-related calls and making initial physical contact with infected individuals. Given that the nature of the work requires such close contact with patients, it is vital that these first responders have access to proper PPE to protect them in the course of their duties.

We have heard that in some areas, PPE distribution is being prioritized to healthcare facilities over fire departments and EMS agencies. While we support the delivery of PPE to healthcare facilities, we reiterate that fire and emergency services personnel are on the front lines interacting directly with infected individuals; in fact, they often provide patient transport to a healthcare facility. As the federal government continues to work to distribute PPE to affected areas, please ensure that this PPE is distributed to fire and emergency services personnel, as well as to healthcare facilities.

Additionally, we urge the administration to take steps to increase the supply of PPE in this country dramatically.

Fire and Emergency Services Personnel Must Be Prioritized for Testing - Especially Rapid Testing

As test kits continue to be distributed to states and rapid test kits are developed, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics must be prioritized for testing. When there is possible exposure to COVID-19, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics must be quarantined to ensure their safety, the safety of their colleagues and families, and the safety of the broader community. However, many fire departments are already facing staffing shortages and quarantines further limit the ability of departments to meet staffing needs. With increased access to testing - especially rapid testing - fire departments will be able to better determine when personnel are infected and must be quarantined, versus when they have not been infected and are able to return to work.

The faster departments can discern whether personnel have been affected, the more they can work to minimize staffing issues at a time when all personnel are needed on the front lines. Without such access to testing, unnecessary quarantines will add to staffing challenges and departments will be unable to meet demand for services. As further testing becomes available, please ensure that fire and emergency services personnel are prioritized for COVID-19 testing.

Fire and Emergency Services Personnel Must Be Prioritized for Drugs and Vaccines

We understand that there is ongoing work to find not only a vaccine for COVID-19, but also to determine whether certain drugs may help combat the virus in those who have been infected. As these vaccines and drugs become available, fire and emergency services personnel must be prioritized to receive these healthcare measures. Many departments are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing staffing shortages due to personnel being infected with COVID-19. If there are vaccinations that can help prevent contracting COVID-19, or medications that can help combat the virus and potentially reduce the length of symptoms, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics must be prioritized to receive such treatments. Not only are these men and women risking their health and putting their lives on the line every day for their communities, but they will continue to do so after recovering from COVID-19 infection. As such, anything that can be done to speed up their return to health - and their return to work, when appropriate - is vital to ensuring the health and safety of their communities.

Fire and Emergency Services Personnel Must Be Notified of Drug Shortages

We understand that there are shortages of certain drugs due to supply chain problems, increased demand, and other factors. However, we also understand that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has so far declined to identify the specific drugs affected. This makes it incredibly challenging for fire departments and EMS agencies to begin identifying and working to attain approval of alternate solutions.

During the pandemic, we urge better communication between the FDA and the fire and emergency services on the issue of drug shortages. While we understand the FDA's desire to avoid further panic or additional runs on these medications with a release of information to the general public, lack of information to major stakeholders - including the fire and emergency services - makes it

harder for first responders to perform their jobs protecting the public. Furthermore, should supplies of these medications be available through the National Strategic Stockpile, fire departments and EMS agencies must be on the list of prioritized entities to receive them.

Fire and emergency services personnel across the country are on the front lines every day working to combat the spread of COVID-19. When the call comes in, our country's firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics do not hesitate to act. We ask you, as Chair of the White House's Coronavirus Task Force, to please help them to do their jobs as safely and effectively as possible by following the above recommendations. Thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

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CC: The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Peter Gaynor, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency