

December 8, 2020

Dr. José Romero, Chairman
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases
1600 Clifton Road, NE, MS-H24-8
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Dr. Romero:

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, journalists have provided essential services, including vital information about COVID-19, to communities throughout the country while assuming the related health risks. To ensure their ability to continue to serve the public in the difficult months ahead, the undersigned news media organizations respectfully request that journalists¹ who are out in the field reporting about health care workers and patients, and meeting with people in essential businesses, covering rallies, protests and public events be considered for inclusion in subsequent phases of vaccine distribution that include Americans providing critical and essential functions in their respective communities.

Journalists consistently provide the important information their viewers, listeners, and readers need, regardless of the dangers or hardships they face. But in times of crisis, journalists represent an even more critical lifeline to their communities. In the case of this enduring pandemic, journalists have taken on an even more essential role, serving as the connective fabric for Americans who are isolated and physically separated from each other, and informing them of the constantly evolving risks in their individual communities. Journalists are also certain to play a significant role in the successful deployment of the vaccine itself, educating Americans about the importance of vaccination, as well as aiding in the monumental task of informing the public about the logistics of the vaccine's dispersal around the country.

To continue providing these critical services, however, journalists cannot simply work from home, but must interact with government officials and the public to report on the stories that matter, regardless of the risks they must assume. Despite efforts to protect themselves and the public, members of the media are necessarily exposed to the COVID-19 virus while doing their jobs and serving as "first informers" in local communities across the country.

¹ The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Agency (CISA) has recognized that "workers who support radio, print, internet and television news and media services, including, but not limited to front line news reporters, studio, and technicians for newsgathering, reporting, and publishing news" provide services that are essential to the continued viability of the nation's critical infrastructure. CISA Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19 Response Version 4.0," (Aug. 18, 2020), at page 19.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to consider the inclusion of journalists in subsequent phases of priority vaccine deployment. We certainly understand and support the value of first vaccinating frontline health care workers, first responders, the most vulnerable at-risk Americans including communities of color, and additional deserving critical fields and sectors. But as you consider the next phases, we hope you will also consider the essential role played by journalists – a role that cannot be performed without physically engaging in the communities they serve, regardless of the risk.

Sincerely,

America's Public Television Stations (APTS)
Asian Americans Journalists Association (AAJA)
National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ)
National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)
National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ)
National Newspaper Association (NNA)
National Press Photographers Association (NPPA)
Native American Journalists Association - NAJA
News Leaders Association (NLA)
NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists
News Media Alliance (NMA)
Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)
Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA)
Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ)