

SENATOR
CATHY GIESSEL

Alaska State Legislature

REPRESENTATIVE
BRYCE EDGMON

Senate President

State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182



Speaker of the House

State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

December 14, 2020

Ms. Cheley Grigsby
Vaccine Liaisons Co-Lead
Alaska Dept. of Health & Social Services
3601 C St, Ste 722
Anchorage, AK 99503
michele.grigsby@alaska.gov

Re: COVID-19 Vaccine priority for Legislators and Capitol staff

Dear Ms Grigsby:

On the cusp of a vaccine for the coronavirus being distributed in Alaska, there are reasons to be hopeful for the coming year.

We are aware that the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice (ACIP) is meeting and contemplating the next Phase of COVID-19 vaccination recipients. The Phase 1b group being considered is Essential Workers. This group is defined as the education sector, food & agriculture, utilities, police, firefighters, corrections officers and transportation personnel. After ACIP makes determinations, the states' vaccine task forces refine the recipient list.

As the presiding officers of the Alaska Legislature, we are writing to request that the Alaska COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force include Legislators and Capitol staff in Group 1b vaccine distribution for Essential Workers.

As January approaches, the convening of the 32nd Alaska Legislature will begin in Juneau. Along with a supporting cast of employees, 60 legislators will assemble in the Capitol building for the start of the 2021 session on January 19. We are tasked by the Alaska Constitution with the essential responsibility of passing a budget and addressing other items made more pertinent by the impacts of the Coronavirus.

We know that a number of Legislators and Capitol staff fall into the high-risk category for serious effects of the coronavirus.

The Legislature has taken steps to make the Capitol safer including, the hiring of a third-party contractor to oversee testing and monitoring of every occupant in the capitol building. Safety protocols have been adopted and individuals will be required to wear masks, socially distance, and avoid gatherings to the extent possible. Furthermore, the number of actual people in the building will be reduced to the barest minimum possible.

In spite of these measures in place, the operations of the Legislature will still require lawmakers and Capitol staff to engage in frequent and close contact with people.

It is also worth noting the Capitol building is nearly 100 years old and is a poorly ventilated structure with many small offices, tight spaces, and people routinely in close contact during regular business hours, including evenings and weekends. It is no secret that as an open access facility, the building has long been considered a petri dish for the transference of communicable diseases. It is a high-risk environment.

Despite the efforts to bolster mitigation efforts, the Capitol will remain an environment of high risk and with one positive test, the building could shut down and entire operations of the Legislature brought to a halt for an extended period of time.

We are aware of the perception that the Legislature would be unfairly prioritized over other vaccine recipients. However, a fully functioning Legislature is vitally important to the recovery of the state as we move beyond the debilitating impacts of the Coronavirus. The Legislative Branch of Alaska government is comprised of Essential Workers.

For these reasons, we are requesting that Legislators and staff be designated in Group 1b, Essential Workers, for the purpose of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

Thank you for taking this request under consideration. We ask for serious and timely consideration given the narrow window of time between now and the start of the session in January.

We would be happy to provide any elaboration that might be required.

Sincerely,



Senate President Cathy Giessel, MS, APRN, FAANP House Speaker Bryce Edgmon

cc: Tessa Walker Linderman, RN
Alaska Vaccine Task Force Co-Lead
Dept. of Health & Social Services
PO Box 110610
Juneau, AK 99811-0610
tessa.walker.linderman@alaska.gov

cc: Adam Crum, Commissioner, AK Dept. of Health & Social Services
Dr. Anne Zink, Chief Medical Officer, AK Dept. of Health & Social Services
Senator Tom Begich, Senate Minority Leader
Senator Gary Stevens, Chair, Legislative Council
Representative Bryce Edgmon, Speaker of the House
Senator Cathy Giessel, President of the Senate

