



CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
JIMMY PATRONIS
STATE OF FLORIDA

December 15, 2020

Mr. Peter T. Gaynor, Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW.
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

In my role as Florida's Chief Financial Officer and State Fire Marshal, I have a unique perspective on the varying roles of critical emergency personnel in our state. Last year, I was honored to be appointed to FEMA's National Advisory Council (NAC) to help your team ensure effective and ongoing coordination of federal emergency management activities in Florida. Moreover, I have also previously served on Florida's Public Service Commission (PSC), which regulates our state's utility companies.

As you may know, we have recently taken issue with the way the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has refused to classify firefighters as health care professionals. Another issue, however, that must be addressed is prioritizing utility workers for COVID-19 vaccine distribution. As the current CDC's guidance classifies utility workers as part of "1b essential workers," Florida's lineman must be provided *extra* consideration, as they are critical personnel who provide life-saving resources to our communities, especially during perilous emergency situations.

More directly stated: we need to ensure that guidance is crystal clear that utility workers must have access to the vaccines before the next hurricane season. Therefore, I am requesting FEMA coordinate with the White House Coronavirus Task Force and the CDC to develop more detailed guidance on providing utility workers the COVID-19 vaccine with the stated goal of having these heroes covered before the 2021 hurricane season, which begins June 1.

With respect to protecting our utility workers, we must be proactive and not reactive. The record-breaking 2020 Hurricane Season was historic, bringing 30 named storms to the United States. The 2021 Hurricane Season will begin in June and that leaves roughly five months to ensure our linemen and women are vaccinated so they are standing ready to support our communities at a moment's notice. After Hurricane Michael hit my hometown of Panama City as a massive Category 5 storm, you and I toured the devastation together and saw first-hand the heroic actions of these highly trained linemen

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and the importance of their profession to Florida families and businesses. Just like our firefighters and other first responders, we must do all we can to protect them as they work to support our communities.

For those that may not live in communities that are more prone to hurricanes, I cannot overstate how important our linemen and women are to Florida. Moreover, policy leaders must understand that utility workers are often deployed to other states to respond to major weather events. Thus, if the nation finds itself in a situation where we have major weather event that impacts Texas, Florida, Louisiana or New Jersey, we will have utility workers deployed throughout the entire nation – and if they're not protected from COVID-19, it will impact our ability to get our hospitals, schools, shelters, gas stations, etc., back online to support recovery efforts.

Lastly, Florida's utility personnel work in an extremely specialized industry. They support a complicated and technical system of utility infrastructure that powers our great state from Pensacola to Key West. If one segment of this critical population of utility personnel goes offline with a rash of COVID cases, this could cause catastrophic staffing issues to Florida's utility services and power sources, including our state's five nuclear power plants. This cannot happen during an emergency. Homes, businesses, and most importantly - lives could be lost.

As a fourth-generation Floridian, a statewide elected official, and a constant advocate for our first responders, I am obligated to arm you with this information to support our most critical needs in our state.

To discuss further, please contact my office at 850-413-4900.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Patronis
Chief Financial Officer

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