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March 1, 2021

The Honorable Phil Murphy
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: Vaccine Eligibility

Dear Governor Murphy,

Our association, representing the motor fuel retailing, convenience store, and automotive repair industries in New Jersey, appreciates your efforts to devise and implement a distribution framework by which the COVID-19 vaccines are distributed in a fair and impactful manner. Our industry is not alone in looking forward to the day when Americans can access a vaccine and eventually return to life as it was before COVID-19.

As the eligibility criteria begins to expand to those working in certain industries, we ask that your Administration prioritize employees of frontline essential businesses, specifically gas stations and convenience stores. As you are no doubt aware, New Jersey now has the only statewide prohibition on self-serve gasoline sales in the US. As a result, these attendants must come within 6 feet of all gasoline customers in order to transact business. While attendants are masked, many motorists are not masked during the brief outdoor interaction. Gasoline cannot be legally sold in New Jersey unless it is pumped by an attendant, and if all of a station's attendants are sick then the station must literally close to the public before allowing any motorist to pump their own gas. We had several members experience this during the height of the pandemic last year. This is a uniquely New Jersey problem and is therefore little mentioned by CDC or other state vaccination plans, so I urge the Administration not to forget these frontline workers.

I would also urge that convenience store workers are not forgotten in any definition of grocery store workers. These employees also sell food and other products essential to the public and work in spaces much smaller than the typical grocery store.

Once employees of frontline essential businesses have been made eligible, we ask that the next eligibility criteria be the remainder of workers at essential businesses, including auto repair shops. While employees of these businesses generally do not have the extensive face-to-face contact with the general public that employees at gas stations and convenience stores, they do work at a business that is essential and that requires their physical presence at all times.

Employees in our industry serve on the front lines of the fuel and food distribution systems across the country. This includes consumer-facing retail sales of food and motor fuels as well as distribution of many of these critical products. We think this is an appropriate classification for our industry’s employees given their necessity to the day-to-day lives of Americans in all walks of life – including first responders. Without our industry getting motor fuels to market, for example, front-line workers throughout all industries would be unable to get to work – halting the economy and preventing first responders who would be unable to get to those in need. When vaccine distribution begins, trucks delivering the vaccine will depend on our retailers to be open to refuel. The food and convenience items our industry provides are also critical as our industry often has the most convenient locations and allows for quick shopping trips for American consumers. This is also helpful for first responders, especially because stores in our industry are typically the only ones open extended hours (or 24 hours per day) to serve their needs.

Our employees have put themselves at risk since the beginning of the pandemic, working despite health concerns, and we believe they should be prioritized in vaccine deployment. We appreciate your consideration of our comments and sincerely thank you for the hard work you have done to protect the health of our state.



Sincerely,

Sal Risalvato
Executive Director
NJ Gasoline, Convenience Store, Automotive Association

Cc: The Honorable Judith Persichilli