

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director, Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Secretary Buttigieg and Director Walensky:

America's maritime industry and the frontline essential critical infrastructure workers it employs are integral to the resilience of our regional economy and the national supply chain. That is why in representing our congressional districts, we have continued to strongly advocate for the health of the Marine Transportation System (MTS) and the safety of the men and women of our maritime community. These men and women have delivered for the nation every day during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to safely and reliably transport the cargoes and products that their fellow Americans depend on.

We are writing to bring your direct attention to recent COVID-19 vaccination prioritization recommendations made by the U.S. Committee on the Marine Transportation System (CMTS). As you know, the CMTS – which includes representatives from both of your agencies – serves as a Federal interagency coordinating committee for the purpose of making recommendations regarding federal policy that affects the MTS. Last summer, the CMTS established a COVID-19 Working Group to facilitate interagency coordination in response to shared challenges posed by the pandemic.

Earlier this month, the CMTS COVID-19 Working Group issued two white papers recommending that, “[d]ue to the constant risk of exposure and transmittal of COVID-19,” both U.S. merchant mariners and U.S. port workers should be elevated in COVID-19 vaccination prioritization from ‘Phase 1(c) – Other Essential Workers’ to ‘Phase 1(b) – Frontline Essential Workers.’ The white papers highlight the COVID-19 risks to mariners posed by the congregate living and working environment and close quarters onboard many vessels, as well as the supply chain impacts that could result from a COVID-19 outbreak among port workers.

As we learned at the outset of the pandemic, when supply chains are disrupted, the consequences can be felt across our economy and from hospital stockrooms to grocery store shelves. That is why we strongly support the CMTS recommendations to elevate the prioritization of U.S. merchant mariners and port workers in COVID-19 vaccine allocation and urge your respective agencies to work together to adjust federal guidance and encourage states to adopt it.

As frontline essential critical infrastructure workers, merchant mariners and port workers continue to support our nation in our times of need. We must reciprocate that support, and secure the strength of our economy, by ensuring their health and safety. We appreciate your consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,



Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress



Robert Wittman
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Nanette Barragán
Member of Congress



Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



Garret Graves
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress