Re: Vaccination Priority and Essential Worker Status for the Port and Maritime Industry

Dear Governor Cuomo, Governor Murphy, Senator Schumer, Senator Gillibrand, Senator Booker, Senator Menendez and Members of Congress:

The Waterfront Alliance and our board of directors call on our region’s leadership and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to prioritize port and maritime workers for priority vaccination. Designated essential by DHS in March of 2020, marine transportation workers should now be included in front-line groups currently receiving the vaccine for Covid-19.
Waterfront Alliance is a non-profit civic organization and coalition of more than 1,100 alliance partners ranging from environmental advocates to educational institutions to businesses and corporations. Our mission is to inspire and enable resilient, revitalized and accessible coastlines for all communities.

The port and maritime industry of New Jersey and New York, and the Northeast and Midwest supply chains they are responsible for, are essential to our region and our national economy. The frontline workers of our ports have been working tirelessly working through this national time of great challenge to ensure that food, medical supplies, personal protective equipment, fuel, industrial equipment, and other products reach businesses, consumers, industry, and health care operations.

Many workers have tragically paid with illness and even their lives. We must recognize this sacrifice and we must commit to what is needed immediately for their protection to safeguard our port workers now and for the future.

In New York and New Jersey, this workforce includes but is not limited to licensed mariners, longshoremen, stevedores, inspectors, skilled trades, fuel terminal operators and shore connections such as drivers, dispatchers, customs, or insurance.

Recognizing that the U.S. Marine Transportation System (MTS) is critical to our nation’s economy and security, DHS Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, with the U.S. Coast Guard, specified these maritime frontline personnel on the “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers” list on 19 March 2020, with these roles also specified essential in state executive orders.¹

It is important to recognize that this vital MTS includes even more than the 506,000 jobs reported in the July 2020 economic impact study of the Port of New York and New Jersey released by the New York Shipping Association. It also includes related maritime sectors such as ferry systems, commercial fishing, waste management, and inland ports on rivers in both New Jersey and New York, encompassing an even larger essential workforce.

Workers in this wider MTS, fulfilling necessary commerce needs, should remain prioritized for the Covid-19 vaccine along with medical and safety personnel. An overburdened MTS increases the possibility of systemic supply-chain disruptions and delays, potentially resulting in enormous losses to the U.S. economy and increased costs to the consumer.

Additionally, with the economic potential of offshore wind development on the horizon, it is important to continue supporting the MTS and to support the recovery of the economic engine that is the Port of New York and New Jersey. These essential workers need protection to continue to do their essential jobs. Port workers, already specified as essential infrastructure workers in executive orders, should receive early access to the vaccine.

Thank you for considering these important actions to support the region’s working waterfront.

Sincerely,

Cortney Koenig Worrall
CEO and President

Chris Ward
Chairman of the Board

¹https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ECIW_4.0_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_Final3_508_1.pdf