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The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor of the State of Ohio
77 S. High St., 30th Fl.
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

I request that you add law-enforcement officers to the list of those who are first to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

The decision on how to allocate a scarce, lifesaving vaccine is a difficult one, and you must have agonized over all the competing rationales, knowing that lives will depend on the decision you make.

But there are compelling reasons for law-enforcement to be among the first to receive the vaccine.

First, the federal Centers for Disease Control advises including law-enforcement in Phase 1B of the vaccine rollout, along with other first responders. States such as Kentucky, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Michigan, New York, Illinois, Arizona, California, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada and Iowa have included police in their Phase 1 vaccine distributions.

CDC guidelines prioritize vaccination for medical first-responders. Certainly, Ohio's law-enforcement officers are medical first-responders. Typically, they are first on the scene of an accident, disaster or violent incident and begin administering first aid long before emergency medical personnel are summoned.

Also consider the hundreds of Ohioans who are alive today because a police officer or sheriff's deputy administered an immediate and lifesaving dose of Narcan to someone suffering an opioid overdose.

Because of their role, officers also are at high risk of contracting and spreading the virus. Ohio's law-enforcement officers have thousands of interactions with the public every day, often in circumstances that increase the chances of disease transmission. Providing first-aid at an accident scene is an obvious example. Responding to a domestic violence incident puts officers inside private homes in close circumstances with residents who might not be taking health precautions. Wrestling to control a violent suspect carries obvious risk. Transporting suspects in a closed squad car means breathing the same air. Jail duty involves similar risks of infection and transmission.

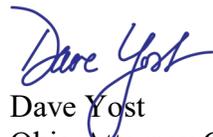
When officers contract COVID, the resulting hospitalization or quarantine removes them from duty, reducing the staffing and effectiveness of their law-enforcement agency. I recently received a message from the chief of the West Carrollton Police Department who said that in recent months about half of his department has been infected with COVID-19, leaving his agency seriously short-staffed. These shortages reduce public safety. Ohioans need protection from disease, but they also need protection from crime.

Not only do unvaccinated officers risk passing the virus along to vulnerable people, including their own families, officers themselves may have health conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes that put them in higher-risk categories. While many officers are young and therefore face lower COVID risks, not all of them are. According to a tally compiled by the national Fraternal Order of Police, at least eight Ohio officers have died of COVID through January 5. Nationwide, 337 officers have died after contracting COVID.

Officers already put their lives on the line for us every day. We should seize any opportunity to reduce the deadly threats they face. Putting them on the priority list for COVID vaccinations does this. They have earned it and we owe it to them.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this letter. My prayers are with you as you wrestle with a crisis that is far more consequential than most Ohio governors have had to face.

Yours,



Dave Yost
Ohio Attorney General