



9 January 2021

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader
New York State Senate
LOB 907
188 State Street
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Honorable Senator Stewart-Cousins:

On behalf of the over 7,000 members that include municipalities across the state, the New York Section of the American Water Works Association, the New York Rural Water Association, and the New York Water Environment Association represent, we would like to highlight for you of the silent, yet essential work that our utilities do to help protect New York residents from COVID-19.

While we may not see them on the front lines, the work of our drinking water and water resource recovery operators is a key part of fighting the spread of the coronavirus. One of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's top recommendations for halting the spread of COVID-19 is to thoroughly and frequently wash your hands. Without the safe, clean water provided to us by our water utilities, we would not be able to take this basic precaution. Additionally, wastewater utilities across the state are acting as early detection systems, giving towns and cities the ability to know when an outbreak occurs before positive test begin to spike. Their ability to track the spread of coronavirus on a large scale makes them a unique and vital tool for identifying microcluster hotspots before illness becomes wide-spread.

Water is essential to life, and critical for controlling the spread of COVID-19! Each one of our offices are receiving inquiries from these front line workers why they are not considered essential. The thousands of essential water and water resource recovery operators are the vital component in ensuring continued access to this.

We understand and support the State's *COVID-19 Vaccination Program* plan for vaccine distribution, starting with front line essential workers and moving to those who are at high risk for illness or contact. In accordance with this program, it appears water and water resource

recovery operators fall under Phase 2 of the population risk and essential worker phases of the program. **As essential front line workers, we respectfully request that water and water resource recovery operators be given the highest priority and that vaccinations be made available to the workforce of our utilities as soon as possible.** Our utilities have done everything within their power to ensure the continued safety of their workers but, in a job where physical distancing cannot always be possible, early access to the vaccine will allow them to continue the necessary work they are doing to fight this pandemic and maintain the continuity of services.

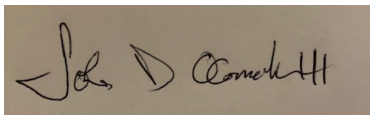
The work of our drinking water and water resource recovery operators are vital to the health and wellbeing of New York residents during this unprecedented time. We urge you to remember our utility operators as the essential workers they are, and make sure that, as front line workers, they are prioritized during the next phase of vaccine distribution.

We cannot survive without water. Thank you for making these essential water workers a priority!

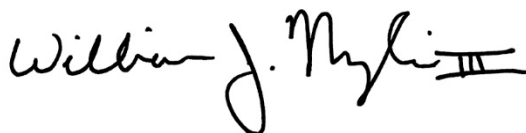
Sincerely,



Paul J. Ponturo, PE
NYSAWWA President



John O'Connell
NYRWA President



William J. Nylic, III
NYWEA President

CC:

Patricia Cerro – Reehil; Executive Director; NYWEA

Jamie Herman; Chief Executive Director; NYRWA

Jenny Ingrao; Executive Director; NYSAWWA