Good afternoon members of P&F and HHN Committees,

I am writing to express concern about Covid-19 vaccine distribution. It has come to my attention that a small number of Human Service's staff at the Job Center as well as the entire staff at the DA's office have been or are scheduled to be vaccinated by the weeks end. I understand that many people over this past year have been and continued to feel the stress and weight of Covid-1 and that many people are awaiting the vaccination. Everyone deserves being vaccinated and I also understand the increased pressures on local, state and federal government agencies to reopen schools and businesses for economic reasons. The need to prioritize the distribution of the vaccines becomes urgent and difficult. While determining the need for vaccines, first consideration should go to individuals who have daily face to face contact with the community; who do not have the ability to use protective screens when coming in contact with individual; are unable to use zoom to fulfill their work responsibilities, are unable to work from home and those who cannot control the environments in which they work. Some examples of this are Police and Fire, EMS and hospital staff. I would like to take this opportunity to advocate for another group of individuals who also meet this definition and that is Child Protective Services (CPS) Social Workers. I am asking that priority distribution not only be considered but made available for CPS Social Workers in Dane County. Since the beginning of the pandemic, beginning in March 2020, CPS Social Workers have continued to perform job duties, similar to law enforcement and EMS in that they have continued to meet with high-risk groups of people in their homes and the community where mask wearing, and social distancing is not always adhered to by the client and cannot be mandated by the Social Worker. CPS Social Workers have continued to have daily contact with clients in their homes, hotels, hospitals, shelters, or other community settings. These contacts with clients are not an option but a requirement of the job and a necessary practice to ensure that children and families are safe. These social workers have no access to accurate or reliable information on whether clients have symptoms, have had symptoms or are asymptomatic for Covid-19. There are often multiple people and or families residing in a single home. These contacts can last for an hour or more and occur with multiple families on a single day. There can be no mandated social distancing when children are crawling on Social Workers laps, wanting to sit next to the Social Worker and often the living environments are small and confined.

These contacts increase the risk to the social worker despite the social workers age or underlying medical conditions. It also increases the risk to the families in the community as well as the Social Workers own families. Contact tracing is not useful given the lack of reliable data or reporting from clients and numerous daily contacts. I would like to add that due to these job requirements along with limited PPE supplied to the social workers, there has been a great deal of anxiety that goes along with every home visit or contact with clients. This is no different for a CPS Social Worker as it is for Law Enforcement or EMS staff. It is for these reasons that I believe that CPS Social Workers should be prioritized for the Covid-19 vaccine. It is understandable that distribution is a difficult decision and I am not attempting in any way to dismiss the difficult jobs and responsibilities of other Government or Private Employees, however those who do not have the ability to control the environment in which they work and therefore are at higher risk of exposure should be given priority. I am advocating for CPS workers as a person who has performed these duties for Child Protection for 30 plus years and also a long hauler of Covid-19.

I am requesting that you consider establishing a priority plan for distribution to CPS Social Workers who have continued and ongoing direct face to face contact with clients; and that you communicate a distribution plan with Department of Human Services management leaders.

Thank you for your consideration.

Amy Otto