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December 11, 2020

The Honorable Kay Ivey
Suite N-104
State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130-2751

Sent electronically to: info@governor.alabama.gov

Dear Governor Ivey:

On December 10 the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) approved an emergency use authorization (EUA) by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer, Inc. in partnership with BioNTech Manufacturing GmbH. This decision will expedite the delivery of the first COVID-19 vaccine in the United States. Many expect the Pfizer vaccine's rollout to commence within a matter of days. The VRBPAC will meet again next week to consider EUA approval for another COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by Moderna, Inc.

As you prioritize vaccine recipients in the Alabama distribution plan, the American Academy of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS) urges you to consider the particular vulnerability of otolaryngologists (ear, nose and throat physicians or ENTs) when treating patients with COVID-19. Otolaryngologists, whether practicing at a major academic institution or in community-based hospitals across the country are called to examine all age groups with upper airway problems, both urgent and emergent in nature. In these urgent situations, the COVID status of the patient is often unknown. The area of the body that otolaryngologists examine and treat encompasses the nasal cavity, nasopharynx, oral cavity and oropharynx where the highest concentration of the virus is found in human beings. This puts the ENT physician at increased risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19 as they care for virtually all of their patients in need. We fully support the prioritization of healthcare providers as the first line of vaccine recipients. Further, since otolaryngologists assume a higher

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level of risk based on their patient population, we respectfully request placement in the top tier of this group.

The AAO-HNS is the largest organization in the United States representing specialists who treat patients with medical problems involving the ear, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy represents approximately 12,000 otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons who diagnose and treat disorders of those areas. The medical ailments treated by our specialty are among the most common that afflict all Americans, old and young, including hearing loss, balance disorders, chronic ear infections, rhinological disorders, snoring and sleep disorders, swallowing disorders, facial and other cranial nerve disorders, and head and neck cancer.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at any time.

Sincerely,

James C. Denny III

James C. Denny III, MD
EVP/CEO

