



Customs and Immigration Union
Syndicat des Douanes et de l'Immigration

March 25, 2021

BY EMAIL: hon.bill.blair@canada.ca
(original by mail)

Hon. Bill Blair
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
House of Commons
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A6

RE: COVID-19 vaccination of frontline CBSA officers and employees

Dear Minister Blair,

With vaccination against COVID-19 now ongoing across Canada, I wish to highlight the urgent need for the members of the Customs and Immigration Union (CIU), who work for the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), to be vaccinated along with other essential frontline workers. As federal workers are often overlooked by provincial authorities, I am asking for your help to ensure that our members are suitably prioritized as part of vaccination efforts in all provinces.

As you know, provincial governments are responsible for establishing the immunization schedule, and for administering the vaccine. Vaccination plans therefore vary greatly from one province to another, which makes the resulting situation especially difficult to navigate for federal workers. Indeed, two federal public servants who work in a similar environment, who perform the same duties, but who are located in different jurisdictions may very well not benefit from the same access to priority vaccination, if they are prioritized at all.

New Brunswick and Newfoundland & Labrador made it clear early on that frontline CBSA personnel would be vaccinated as part of their Stage 2, along with other essential workers, in line with [federal vaccine rollout guidelines](#). A few provinces — Ontario, Nova Scotia, Alberta, and British Columbia — indicated at one time or another that frontline workers and police officers would be prioritized, without explicitly including Border Services officers in their order of priority. This understandably caused some confusion amongst our members, as many perform frontline duties. While there has since been some positive movement in Ontario, at the time of writing the situation remains unclear, as it does in British Columbia and Alberta. In Nova Scotia, unfortunately, the provincial government has confirmed to CBSA that Border Services personnel would not receive priority immunization.

Finally, other governments, in Quebec, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, appear to have decided to eschew — for the most part — any order of priority other than age-based immunization, therefore shutting the door to accelerated vaccination for any non-healthcare frontline worker, including our members.

It goes without saying that certain groups, such as the elderly, healthcare workers, or those working in very high-risk environments, do need to be at the front of the vaccination line. However, first responders and law enforcement personnel such as police officers or, in the case of our members, Border Services officers, also operate in environments where they are likely to come into contact with COVID-19 sources. With a 3rd wave now underway in many parts of the country, and with increased community transmission of COVID variants, it is therefore essential

for these workers to also be protected in a timely fashion, and not placed at the bottom of the order of priority in any province.

For the better part of the past year, CBSA men and women have continued to perform critical work despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The reality is that every day, CBSA officers and employees put their health at risk by coming into close contact with potential COVID-19 sources while fulfilling their duties:

- As screening officers under the Quarantine Act, we interview potentially ill travellers, assessing them for signs of illness;
- With commercial activities still going strong at the border, we continue to inspect goods coming into the country, processing hundreds of truck drivers originating from or transiting through COVID-19 hotspots;
- We work in mail processing centres in proximity to other workers who may have been exposed to COVID-19;
- We escort detainees around the world, regardless of the preventative measures or lack thereof that exist in that country;
- We work at Canada's Immigration Holding Centres, often in close quarters with detainees;
- We have also been instrumental in swiftly processing orders of personal protective equipment much needed during the pandemic and, recently, in clearing the first vaccine shipments at airports and land borders.

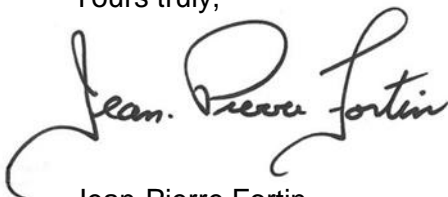
Simply put, Border Services workers and officers have been playing a crucial role in keeping Canadians safe and the cross-border economy active. I am certain you will agree: They must be adequately protected to continue this important work.

For the past weeks, CIU members have been contacting their provincial representatives to highlight the pressing need for timely vaccination. As CIU National President, I have also personally written to provincial premiers, urging governments to include all frontline personnel in their accelerated vaccination schedule. In some cases, the response has been positive, but overall the landscape remains considerably uneven.

You recently met, virtually, with Border Services Officers in Lacolle, thanking them for their tireless work in keeping the country safe. Such recognition was certainly welcomed by our members. I also understand you indicated that, if needed, you would be in touch with provincial authorities to advocate in favour of priority immunization for our members. I am therefore writing to you today to ask for your support in this endeavour: No matter the province, frontline border personnel must not be left behind, and must be included in accelerated vaccination efforts.

I thank you in advance for giving this matter the consideration it deserves. I remain at your disposal should you have any questions, and I look forward to your reply.

Yours truly,



Jean-Pierre Fortin
National President
Customs and Immigration Union