

Working Group on Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

July 21, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Office of the Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, the Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Office of the Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, the Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the undersigned members of the Working Group on Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, we are writing to urge you to remove language from the FY2010 Supplemental Appropriations Act passed by the House that would take offsets from unspent pandemic influenza dollars and the Project Bioshield Special Reserve Fund (SRF). We hope the Appropriations Committee will ensure the integrity of these funds and insist that the Administration obligate these dollars as they were intended, to prepare the United States for a biological disaster.

While we appreciate the appropriators' point of view that the levels of unobligated funds are troubling, it is important to note that pandemic preparedness and response cannot be stood up overnight, nor should it be viewed as a short-term event. The threat remains warranting vigilance on the part of the Nation's public health system to maintain robust disease surveillance, epidemiologic investigation, education and outreach, and communications programs and services.

If a new pandemic were to emerge, Congress could not expect the United States to be instantaneously prepared. Ongoing, advanced funding has been responsible for building up the nation's domestic vaccine production capacity, influenza surveillance and laboratory testing, and planning at the federal, state, and local levels. These investments were critical to mitigating the impact of the H1N1 influenza A outbreak in our country. H1N1 also illustrated gaps in the nation's preparedness for a more severe disease emergency. Public health departments, in the face of staff lay-offs, mounted a successful response only with the aid of the H1N1 supplemental funding. Vaccine production was delayed, and the healthcare system strained to respond to a relatively mild disease.

The threat of a severe flu pandemic has also not diminished. It could take the form of H1N1 or a mutation thereof, H5N1, which continues to circulate in parts of Asia, or a currently unknown virus. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has stated that the H1N1 virus is still circulating, and it is unknown if the virus will resurface in a more severe form in the 2010-2011 flu season. Therefore, we urge you to maintain contingency funding for what could occur in the coming years. For example, expired antivirals, which were usable under an Emergency Use Authorization during H1N1, must now be replaced, along with the antivirals that were distributed, personal protective equipment, syringes, and other supplies. In addition, vaccine production must continue to

be modernized, pandemic plans must be updated and enhanced influenza surveillance maintained, and there needs to be continued research into rapid diagnostics and medical countermeasures.

The Project Bioshield Special Reserve Fund is an additional important tool in America's efforts to grow and maintain domestic biodefense capabilities. Our nation is already lagging in its ability to research and develop the medical countermeasures to respond to the next bioterror attack or emerging infectious disease outbreak. The SRF was developed in recognition that significant government investment is needed to attract private sector production of vaccines, drugs, and devices. Without the guarantee of government procurement, pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms will not have the incentive to invest decades of research and billions of dollars into developing products for these rare events. As we await the HHS review of the federal medical countermeasure enterprise, it would be irresponsible to defund a crucial element of that venture at this time.

We applaud Congress for its foresight in beginning to invest in pandemic preparedness in 2006 and in Bioshield in 2004. We will continue to urge the Administration to obligate these funds as appropriate, to update federal, state, and local pandemic plans, and to advise Congress of the need for future appropriations.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Biosecurity
American Hospital Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Public Health Association
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC)
Center for Biosecurity, UPMC
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Safety Equipment Association
National Association of County and City Health Officials
Planet Biotechnology Inc.
Trust for America's Health
VaxInnate, Inc.

CC: Sec. Kathleen Sebelius
Sen. Daniel Inouye
Sen. Tom Harkin
Sen. Thad Cochran
Sen. Michael Enzi
Sen. Joe Lieberman
Sen. Susan Collins
Sen. Richard Burr