

March 19, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole,

On behalf of the Vector-Borne Disease Network, we the undersigned organizations write to express our strong support for efforts related to vector-borne diseases (VBD) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). **We urge you to provide at least \$10.0 billion for CDC in the fiscal year (FY) 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bills, with at least \$82.603 million in funding for CDC's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases (DVBD), to fully fund the \$30 million authorized by the Kay Hagan Tick Act for that work.**

The past year has demonstrated the importance of public health preparedness, and no agency is more central to that than the CDC. More people have been spending time outside last year and this year to safely distance from friends and family in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure. However, this may increase the risk of exposure to other diseases spread by insects and arthropods like ticks and mosquitoes if individuals do not take appropriate steps to protect themselves from those threats. And while some cases of COVID-19 may lead to long term negative health consequences for those who are exposed, so too will exposure to VBDs that are not appropriately diagnosed and treated. We are grateful for strong Congressional support for VBD programs in recent years and believe that ongoing investments in this area are crucial for combatting the escalating burden of VBD, perhaps now more than ever before.

The Vector-Borne Disease Network is a stakeholder group of non-profit organizations led by the Entomological Society of America (ESA) that aims to reduce human and animal suffering caused by arthropod disease vectors. Many notorious public health threats, such as Lyme disease, Zika virus, malaria, and West Nile virus, are transmitted by arthropod vectors like ticks and mosquitoes. Between 2004 and 2016, reported human disease cases in the U.S. resulting from bites from arthropod vectors tripled.¹ Meanwhile, nine new pathogens spread by ticks and mosquitoes were discovered or introduced in that same timeframe. Disease vectors also pose significant threats to both livestock and companion animals. Because both the underlying causes of and potential solutions for these trends are

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/vector-borne/index.html>

varying and complex, robust and dedicated funding for addressing challenges in VBD is needed now more than ever.

Kay Hagan Tick Act: The coalition is highly appreciative of the \$6 million to support the *Kay Hagan TICK Act* that was provided in the FY 2021 omnibus. The VBDN's ask for FY 2022 is for an additional \$24 million on top of the FY 2021 discretionary budget of \$58.603 million for the **CDC's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases (DVBD)** to fully fund the amount authorized by Congress for a total of *at least \$82.603 million*. The *Kay Hagan Tick Act* supports two key programs essential to VBD prevention, surveillance, testing, and response activities: the CDC Regional Centers of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases and CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant program.

The *Kay Hagan TICK Act* authorized the program at **\$10 million per year** for the **CDC Regional Centers of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases** which supports five centers across the country. Full funding is important to support this novel program which increases the coordination between academic institutions and state and local departments of health to ensure research findings and information are getting out into the community more rapidly, support surveillance efforts, and promote outreach and education.

The **CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant program** is critical for efforts related to the surveillance, detection, response, and prevention of infectious diseases, including VBD. In 2020 the CDC's DVBD received requests for nearly \$50 million from the state departments of health for VBD through the ELC program. However, the DVBD was only able to support \$16.1 million, less than a third of the needed resources to address VBD across the nation at the state and county level. The *Kay Hagan TICK ACT* authorizes **\$20 million** and that still will not come close to meeting needs at the state level.

Providing the full level of funding authorized by these important pieces of legislation would be highly effective in facilitating the development and implementation of a national strategy to combat VBD.

Strengthening Mosquito Abatement for Safety and Health (SMASH) Act: While the *Kay Hagan Tick Act*, authorized \$20 million for the ELC grants, the *Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act*, Section 607, the Strengthening Mosquito Abatement for Safety and Health (SMASH), authorized a total of \$100 million for the ELC grants related to vector management. \$20 million in the *Kay Hagan Tick Act* would be an improvement, but the state, county, and local departments of health remain vastly underfunded, and this creates a workforce challenge as budgets fluctuate from year to year.

The COVID-19 pandemic response necessitated many state and local health departments to redirect staff from other vital tasks such as mosquito control-related activities, resulting in less capacity to surveil and mitigate potential mosquito-borne public health threats. This is particularly true in low-income communities whose limited tax base is often challenged in responding to the public health threats associated with mosquito-borne illness. In addition, CDC acknowledged concern about this disruption of mosquito control and abatement efforts and released a joint policy brief with the Environmental Protection Agency in July 2020 regarding the importance of continuation of mosquito prevention efforts even during a national public health emergency. Sustained, robust investment in public health infrastructure, including the workforce, is necessary to be prepared to respond to the next pandemic, which could very well be one spread by insects and other arthropods instead of the air. As a nation we

were reminded this year that it is critical to have a well-funded and supported capacity before a crisis, we cannot successfully develop one in the middle of an emergency.

Data Modernization: The VBDN wishes to express our appreciation for the Congressional support for data modernization at the CDC which was supported at \$50 million in FY 2020 and 2021, the \$500 million included in last year's *CARES Act*, and the additional \$500 million in the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*. Looking towards the future, sustained support for data infrastructure will be critical to modernize healthcare in this nation as public health data currently remains siloed from other healthcare data. Connecting public health labs to other parts of the health care system is essential to our ability to respond to a detected outbreak in real-time. As diseases and insects do not respect county, state, or territorial boundaries, a robust data infrastructure will be the only way to meaningfully protect the U.S. against future biological threats. This funding will help lead to better detection of emerging outbreaks of all kinds of diseases, including vector-borne ones, and we thank you for your support.

CDC is the first line of defense for our nation's health, safety, and security, and it is crucial that the agency has the resources it needs to protect Americans from serious threats like VBD. On behalf of our coalition of stakeholders invested in the mission to reduce the ongoing as well as emerging threats posed by ticks, mosquitoes, and other arthropod vectors, we thank you for your commitment to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

American Mosquito Control Association
American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene
American Veterinary Medical Association
Anastasia Mosquito Control District, St. Augustine, FL
Associated Executives of Mosquito Control Work in New Jersey
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Delta Vector Control District
Entomological Society of America
Georgia Mosquito Control Association
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Lee County Mosquito Control District
Midwest Center of Excellence for Vector-Borne Disease
Mosquito and Vector Control Association of California
National Association of Vector-Borne Disease Control Officials
National Environmental Health Association
New Jersey Mosquito Control Association
New Jersey State Mosquito Control Commission
Northeast Regional Center for Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases
North Carolina Mosquito and Vector Control Association
Pacific Southwest Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases
Puerto Rico Vector Control Unit
Society for Vector Ecology
Southeastern Center of Excellence in Vector Borne Diseases
Tulsa Health Department

University of Rhode Island TickEncounter Resource Center
Western Gulf Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases