

April 25, 2022

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 \$11 billion for CDC in the fiscal year (FY) 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bills.** We also ask that you provide, within the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Disease (NCEZID), **at least \$58.603 million in funding for Vector-Borne Diseases (VBD), including \$16.5 million for Lyme disease,** which is level with the FY 2022 Annualized Continuing Resolution (CR). We also ask for **at least \$50 million in NCEZID for the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant program** to support states' work on VBD.

The past two years have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of public health preparedness, and no agency is more central to that than the CDC. 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. This investment is perhaps now more important than ever before, as the last two years have forced so many state and local agencies to reappropriate funding and personnel time to addressing COVID-19 rather than undertaking vector surveillance and management.

The Vector-Borne Disease Network is a stakeholder group of nonprofit 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. Earlier this year, in one community park in Pennsylvania, 92 percent of the ticks tested were found to be carrying Powassan virus,¹ a tick-borne disease with no cure and which was responsible for the untimely death of former Senator Kay Hagan. The highest levels previously detected in one location were around 25 percent positivity. More research needs to be done, but, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest

¹ <https://www.wesa.fm/environment-energy/2022-02-05/rare-but-potentially-deadly-deer-tick-virus-found-at-high-levels-at-a-clearfield-county-park>

where the blacklegged ticks (or deer ticks) that spread this virus are most abundant, this is a worrying discovery. And in March it was reported that Heartland virus, another dangerous but not well-studied VBD, has been detected among lone star ticks in Georgia.² The challenge posed by VBDs only continues to grow with time. Fortunately, the CDC has some critical programs to help address these challenges at the regional, state, and local levels.

CDC Regional Centers of Excellence (COE) in Vector-Borne Diseases: The coalition is highly appreciative of the \$12 million to support the regional COEs, reauthorized in the *Kay Hagan TICK Act*, that was provided in the FY 2022 omnibus. The VBDN's request for FY 2023 is **at least level funding of \$58.603 million**, including **\$16.5 million for Lyme disease**, for the CDC's Vector-Borne Diseases (VBD). These centers were created with emergency Congressional funding following the Zika outbreak but only funded for five years. In that time, the five COEs around the U.S. have produced more than 340 peer-reviewed publications, trained more than 600 students, and supported more than 8,000 professionals trained in practical vector-management techniques. These centers play a unique and critical role in the coordination between academic institutions and state and local health departments to accelerate dissemination of research findings and information into the communities, support surveillance efforts, and promote outreach and education.

CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant program: This funding is critical for efforts related to the surveillance, detection, response, and prevention of infectious diseases, including VBD. In 2021 the CDC's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases received requests for nearly \$32 million from the state departments of health for VBD through the ELC program. However, the Division was only able to support \$14.6 million, less than a third of the needed resources to address VBD across the nation at the state and county level. While the FY 2023 Congressional Justification asks for level funding for the NCEZID's ELC program at \$40 million, we ask for **at least \$50 million** for FY 2023 to help meet the needs of these currently vastly underfunded programs to help with the implementation of a national strategy to combat VBD, which is expected to be delivered to Congress later this year as part of the *Kay Hagan TICK Act*.

Data Modernization: The VBDN expresses our appreciation for the strong Congressional support for data modernization at the CDC in recent years through annual appropriations as well as the *CARES Act* and *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*. 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, and the VBDN requests **\$250 million** for the CDC to carry out this important function. 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 lead to better detection of emerging outbreaks of all kinds, including vector-borne diseases, 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 and emerging threats posed by ticks, mosquitoes, and other arthropod vectors, we thank you for your commitment to this critical issue.

² <https://www.wsbtv.com/news/local/study-reveals-deadly-new-virus-is-circulating-among-ticks-georgia/3DIZSKUN2RA53EL2LIOMJGPK5I/>

Sincerely,

American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Mosquito Control Association
American Society for Microbiology
American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
Anastasia Mosquito Control District
Associated Executives of Mosquito Control Work in NJ
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Delta Mosquito & Vector Control District
Entomological 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 County and City Health Officials
National Environmental Health Association
National Pest Management Association
New Jersey Mosquito Control Association
New Jersey State Mosquito Control Commission
North Carolina Mosquito and Vector Control Association
Northeast Regional Center for Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases
Northeastern Mosquito Control Association
Pacific Southwest Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases
Society for Vector Ecology
Southeastern Center of Excellence in Vector Borne Diseases
US Biologic, Inc.
Western Gulf Center of Excellence in Vector-borne Diseases