

May 13, 2016

Dear Senator,

The undersigned organizations committed to the health and wellbeing of our nation's families and communities urge you in the strongest terms to support the greatest possible level of emergency supplemental funding to prepare for and respond to the Zika virus during consideration of Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations bills, and to oppose efforts to use other important public health funding as an offset.

As you know, the Zika virus has been determined to cause microcephaly, a serious birth defect of the brain, in many babies of mothers who contracted the virus while pregnant. Thousands of devastating birth defects have been observed among infants born in South and Central America in recent months. As of this writing, Zika has already been diagnosed in almost 500 travelers returning to the U.S. from these areas, including close to 50 pregnant women. As the summer months approach and we enter mosquito season, millions of Americans will be exposed to the mosquitos that can spread this virus. Over four million babies are born in our nation each year, and many of their mothers could be at risk for contracting Zika during pregnancy.

Emergency supplemental funding is badly needed to respond to the Zika virus. With this funding, federal, state and local public health professionals will be able to pursue virus readiness and response, enhanced laboratory, epidemiology and surveillance capacity in at-risk areas, and surge capacity through rapid response teams to limit potential clusters of Zika virus. Moreover, supplemental funding will assist the CDC and USAID in efforts to contain the Zika virus in Zika-endemic countries and ensure that there are resources for surveillance, vector control and services for affected pregnant women and children.

If we take immediate action, we may be able to dramatically slow the spread of Zika, giving scientists time to develop and test a vaccine. Without action, however, we fear the number of newborns born with debilitating birth defects will only continue to rise. In addition to the human toll on children and families, the CDC estimates that the average lifetime cost of caring for each child born with microcephaly will likely be millions of dollars *per child*. For hard-hit communities, an epidemic of severe birth defects could quickly overwhelm health care and social services systems, and put extreme pressure on educational and other institutions.

Our nation cannot afford to wait to act until infants and families have already been impacted by Zika virus and its terrible consequences. We urge you to support language to provide the greatest possible amount of emergency resources necessary to protect pregnant women, infants and children from this devastating infection.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Clinical Chemistry