

May 18, 2016

Dear Representative,

The undersigned organizations committed to the health and wellbeing of our nation's children and families urge you to provide emergency supplemental funding to combat Zika virus at or near the President's requested levels, and to reject proposals that fall far short of those amounts, particularly those that would fund efforts against Zika by cutting other vital public health programs and priorities.

As you know, the Zika virus is responsible for causing thousands of severe birth defects in South America over the past year. It also appears likely that Zika is causing miscarriages and less severe birth defects to an as-yet-unknown extent. Zika has spread northward steadily and is now reported to affect almost 50 nations in the Americas. Already, all but five states in the U.S. have reported travel-associated Zika cases, and as many as 30 states fall within the range of the mosquito known to carry this virus. As summer begins, it is possible that Zika virus could gain a foothold in portions of the United States, particularly along our Gulf Coast.

Robust federal, state, tribal and territorial public health responses are critical to our ability to respond to Zika and prevent the terrible birth defects it causes. The President has requested emergency funding to engage in a full range of public health efforts to prevent transmission and educate the American people about how to protect themselves and their loved ones, as well as to assist Zika-endemic nations in stemming the virus. The package represents an appropriately full-fledged response to a potential public health crisis that could have dire consequences for infants and families.

In contrast, we are profoundly disappointed in the inadequate funding levels proposed in H.R. 5243, the Zika Response Appropriations Act. This initiative fails to provide appropriate resources to address any of the needed public health efforts to protect pregnant women and their infants from Zika virus. The bill provides less than one-third of its funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the public health efforts desperately needed this summer, such as laboratory capacity, vector control, and public education. It also appears to restrict funding for the National Institutes of Health only to engaging in vaccine development, which would prevent its use for time-critical needs like cohort studies to determine risk of and susceptibility to birth defects caused by Zika. The fact that this funding is only available until the end of September places unwarranted and counterproductive constraints on its use.

Underfunding Zika prevention efforts will come with a heavy human and economic toll. In addition to experiencing the pain of families with infants born with dreadful preventable birth defects, our nation can expect costs of approximately \$10 million in lifetime costs of care for *each* affected baby. Most of those costs are likely to be borne by the government through Medicaid programs.

Our nation has no time to waste. Even now, it will require an extraordinary effort to move emergency funds into the field to make a meaningful difference in Zika prevention this summer. We urge you to support full funding for Zika prevention and to reject half-measures.