

June 6, 2016

Dear Conferee,

The undersigned organizations committed to the health and wellbeing of our nation's children and families urge you move quickly to provide the highest possible level of funding to fight the Zika virus. We also urge that Congress provide new funding rather than repurpose funds from other high priority public health programs. Unless Congress acts immediately, we risk squandering our nation's opportunity to prevent the Zika virus from gaining a foothold in the United States this summer.

In recent weeks, scientists have confirmed that Zika is the cause of the devastating cases of birth defects seen in South America, parts of Central America, and the Caribbean. As of this writing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is tracking 195 cases of pregnant women infected with Zika in the continental United States and 146 cases in Puerto Rico and other territories. Research is rapidly uncovering the ways Zika evades the mother's immune system, invades the placenta, and wreaks havoc upon the fetal brain. Our nation has never before faced a situation where a single mosquito bite could result in dreadful, permanent, life-altering birth defects.

In light of these facts, it is of paramount importance that Congress act immediately to appropriate adequate emergency supplemental funding. With robust funding, state and local public health professionals would have access to increased virus readiness and response capacity focused on areas with ongoing Zika transmission, enhanced laboratory, epidemiology and surveillance capacity in at-risk areas to reduce the opportunities for Zika transmission and surge capacity through rapid response teams to limit potential Zika clusters in the United States. Moreover, this funding will assist the CDC and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in efforts to contain the Zika virus in affected countries and ensure that there are resources for surveillance, vector control and services for affected pregnant women and children.

Congress' failure to act to date may already mean that funding will be unable to reach states and localities until late summer or fall, wasting valuable weeks and months when aggressive preventive action is crucial. The costs of delay may well be seen in terms of both human suffering and economic burden to government health programs. Given that each infant with microcephaly is expected to require \$10 million in care over a lifetime, just 100 babies with microcephaly – a tiny fraction of all annual births in the United States – would total \$1 billion in costs.

Our nation does not have a moment to lose. 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 immediately develop and pass a conference report at the highest level of funding possible.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO  
African American Health Alliance  
AFSCME  
Alliance for Retired Americans

American Academy of Pediatrics  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
The Association of Flight Attendants – CWA  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American College of Nurse-Midwives  
American College of Preventative Medicine  
The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American Public Health Association  
The Arc  
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health  
Big Cities Health Coalition  
Coalition for Health Funding  
Cooley’s Anemia Foundation  
Easter Seals  
Every Child by Two  
Genetic Alliance  
Healthcare Ready  
HIV Medicine Association  
Infectious Diseases Society of America  
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers  
March of Dimes  
National Association of County and City Health Officials  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Coalition of STD Directors  
National Education Association  
National Environmental Health Association  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Network of Public Health Institutes  
OraSure Technologies  
Public Health Institute  
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition  
Save Babies Through Screening Foundation  
The Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America  
Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine  
Transportation Communications International Union  
Trisomy 18 Foundation  
Trust for America’s Health  
United Steelworkers