

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
United Steelworkers