

June 28, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Reid,

The undersigned organizations committed to the health and wellbeing of our nation's children and families would like to express our dismay at Congress' failure to produce bipartisan legislation to provide federal agencies, states and localities with the funds necessary to combat Zika virus.

Let us be clear: **Zika is a public health emergency.** It is increasingly likely that pregnant women in the U.S. will be infected with Zika this summer and give birth to infants with devastating, preventable birth defects next year.

The conference committee should reconvene immediately to craft a new bill that:

- Provides appropriate funding levels for all aspects of Zika response, including contraception for women who wish to avoid pregnancy, and to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika;
- Does not draw funds from other important public health priorities, including Ebola efforts;
- Does not place unreasonable restrictions on Zika funding, which would hinder the ability of agencies to respond to the virus given that its course is unpredictable;
- Lays a foundation with FY2016 funding that can be built upon responsibly in subsequent fiscal years, since Zika will be a long-term challenge; and
- Is capable of garnering bipartisan support.

The fact that it is already almost July and Congress has failed to act would seem to reflect an appalling indifference to the lives of infants and their families. Our nation is perilously close to the point where it will be impossible to distribute funding to states and localities in order to make a meaningful difference this year. Many at-risk jurisdictions have been forced to lay off trained staff due to cuts and the lack of new resources, even as they are being asked to battle this new threat. Additional resources

are needed immediately to protect pregnant women and their infants from Zika and life-altering birth defects.

CDC Director Tom Frieden has stated that the estimated cost of care for a baby with the severe microcephaly caused by the Zika virus could be up to \$10 million *per child*. If 100 babies are born with this severe form of microcephaly caused by Zika, their care will cost the U.S. economy approximately \$1 billion – roughly the cost of the bipartisan package passed by the Senate. If the inaction in Congress persists, the U.S. and its territories could easily see dozens or even hundreds of infants born with preventable microcephaly, an outcome that would be not only a human tragedy but a significant economic burden.

Once again, we urge you in the strongest possible terms to reconvene the conference committee to produce a responsible Zika funding bill that can pass Congress as quickly as possible. If this does not take place, Congress will bear the full responsibility for Zika-related birth defects across the nation in the coming years.

Sincerely,

African American Health Alliance
AFSCME
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American College of Nurse-Midwives
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Public Health Association
American Society for Clinical Pathology
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Big Cities Coalition
Children's Environmental Health Network
Coalition for Health Funding
Easter Seals
Every Child By Two
Genetic Alliance
Healthcare Ready
HIV Medicine Association
Infectious Diseases Society of America
March of Dimes
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Birth Defects Prevention Network
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Environmental Health Association
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Organization for Rare Disorders
Public Health Institute
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition
RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association
Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Trisomy 18 Foundation
Trust for America's Health