

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
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June 12, 2017

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Walden:

We are writing to urge you to hold a hearing on current U.S. preparedness and ability to manage biological threats. The Energy and Commerce Committee has a longstanding interest in examining this issue, including multiple hearings in 2016 that addressed the findings and policy recommendations of biodefense preparedness commissions, as well as security issues at national bioresearch labs.<sup>1</sup> Given the Committee's record examining these issues, we have serious concerns regarding our present capabilities and how the President's proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 budget will impact medical research, biosurveillance, and emergency preparedness.

Currently, the federal government's biodefense initiatives span across an assortment of agencies, each of which varies in terms of its resources, scope, and approach. In light of the Trump Administration's proposed FY 2018 budget, we are concerned that budget cuts across multiple agencies could weaken U.S. preparedness for a biological attack or emerging infectious disease. For example, the Trump budget proposes a more than \$7 billion reduction to the National Institutes of Health,<sup>2</sup> a more than \$1 billion reduction from the Centers Disease Center,<sup>3</sup> and the closure of the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center<sup>4</sup> – a

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<sup>1</sup> House Committee on Energy and Commerce, *Outbreaks, Attacks, and Accidents: Combatting Biological Threats*, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong. (Feb. 12, 2016); House Committee on Energy and Commerce, *How Secure are U.S. Bioresearch Labs? Preventing the Next Safety Lapse*, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong. (Apr. 20, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> *What's in Trump's 2018 budget request for science?*, Science Magazine (May 23, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *HHS FY2018 Budget in Brief* - CDC (May 2017).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Budget-in-Brief Fiscal Year 2018* (May 2017).

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) laboratory that supports intelligence assessments, preparedness planning, response, emerging threat characterization and bioforensic analysis.<sup>5</sup> According to a former senior DHS official, this facility would provide “essential information that would inform decision makers and save lives” in the event of bioterror attack and its closure would leave the nation without these vital capabilities.<sup>6</sup>

We have not yet received a response to our June 1, 2017 letter requesting a hearing on the impact of President Trump’s proposed FY 2018 budget on agencies within the Committee’s jurisdiction, including the Department of Health and Human Services. The Committee must be vigilant in continuing to examine national preparedness to address biological threats and vulnerabilities, as well as emerging infectious diseases. We urge you to schedule a hearing on this important public health matter as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member



Gene Green  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health



Diana DeGette  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center* (June 7, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel M. Gerstein, *Cuts to US Bioterror Funds Risk Peril in Event of Attack*, The Hill (Jun. 6, 2017).