

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Health Subcommittee Hearing on “Preparing for and Responding to Future Public Health Security Threats”

May 11, 2023

I am pleased we are holding this important hearing today to consider the reauthorization of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act. Reauthorizing PAHPA is of upmost importance for this Committee and this Congress before it expires at the end of September. I am glad we are beginning bipartisan conversations to ensure the programs within this legislation are reauthorized on time.

PAHPA was first enacted in 2006 to improve our nation’s public health and medical preparedness and response capabilities in the event of a public health emergency. Since then, the reauthorization of this law has become a critical legislative opportunity to review and consider the federal government’s health security and response capabilities. It gives us the chance to review the current policies so that we can ensure we are doing everything possible to prepare for future pandemics and public health emergencies.

This includes considering how we can strengthen our public health workforce, enhance our health care supply chains, protect against new and emerging biosecurity threats – including cyber threats – and build a more nimble public health infrastructure that is able to effectively respond in real time.

Today we will be hearing from the leaders of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Administration for Strategic Preparedness & Response (ASPR), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These agencies are central to the federal government’s public health response capabilities. Each serves a unique and critical role in the event of a public health emergency. I look forward to hearing about each of your agency’s priorities as we prepare to reauthorize PAHPA.

This reauthorization is extremely timely. It is the first time we are considering the reauthorization of PAHPA since the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges to the federal government and our public health agencies. Over the last three years, we’ve seen our public health infrastructure pushed to the limit, from medical supply shortages, diagnostic test limitations, communication difficulties, and workforce constraints.

We have learned a lot from these challenges during the pandemic and it is essential that we take this opportunity to ensure we are improving our public health infrastructure. We must do everything we can through this reauthorization to protect our public health institutions, not tear them down.

This is an important opportunity to strengthen the authorities of our public health agencies where they are needed. I believe one area that needs to be strengthened is the authority to collect public health data in order to respond in real time and provide the most up-to-date guidance to the American people.

It's also important that we explore policies that can better prepare our supply chains for the next public health emergency. This morning, our Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee is holding a hearing to look into the critical issue of drug shortages. Shortages of drugs, medical devices, and other supplies repeatedly hampered health professionals' ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am hopeful that through these two hearings, we will explore policies to prevent these shortages in the future.

We will also need to examine implementation of the bipartisan PREVENT Pandemics Act, which we passed into law in last year's consolidated appropriations bill. It included important policies to improve our biosecurity, enhance the Strategic National Stockpile, and strengthen our medical response readiness. However, it is clear that we need to do more.

I look forward to working together with my Republican colleagues to ensure a timely reauthorization of PAHPA. Our nation's public health preparedness and biosecurity cannot and should not be a partisan issue. Effectively protecting our country from the risks of future pandemics and bio-threats requires a comprehensive and bipartisan response without ideological brinkmanship. I hope we can continue to make important progress in good faith on this goal.

I would also like to thank Ranking Member Eshoo and Representative Hudson for their leadership on PAHPA reauthorization and their work on the bipartisan Request for Information that has allowed interested parties and subject matter experts to weigh in. This is an important part of the process as we work to find common ground on proposed legislative language in the weeks to come. We must work together to find bipartisan solutions that enable our public health agencies to be prepared to respond to existing health threats, as well as new risks.

Thank you again to the witnesses for being here today and I yield back.