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IDSAs

Infectious Diseases Society of America

July 7, 2016

The Honorable Angus King
United States Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
United States Senate
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
United States Senate
217 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators King, Burr and Nelson:

The Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSAs) enthusiastically supports the Strengthening Mosquito Abatement for Safety and Health (SMASH) Act, S. 3039. We appreciate your leadership in introducing this important legislation, as its implementation would provide state and local public health authorities the tools necessary to carry out surveillance and control efforts for serious threats such as the Zika virus. We are pleased to see that the legislation authorizes increased funding for grants to carry out these activities.

IDSAs represents over 10,000 infectious diseases physicians and scientists devoted to patient care, prevention, public health, education, and research. Many of our members care for patients with emerging infectious diseases and witness first-hand the impacts of under-resourced public health systems in the United States and abroad.

The Zika virus is the latest example of the need to provide ongoing support for public health programs that address emerging infectious diseases so that we are well prepared to respond as they arise. We know that additional resources are now desperately needed to address the spread of the Zika virus, as well as to maintain our commitment to combating other mosquito-borne illnesses. With no known mosquito-borne transmission of Zika virus in the continental U.S. yet, the situation is likely to change dramatically over the summer, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has already reported 934 travel-associated cases. As you are aware, the Zika virus has been linked to birth defects in infants born to mothers who were infected during pregnancy and to the potentially serious neurological condition— Guillain-Barré syndrome in non-pregnant adults. The federal government must act quickly to help contain the Zika virus in endemic countries, enhance state/ local prevention and response efforts, increase epidemiology and surveillance capacity, and support R&D for vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. We fear that some of these efforts are now unnecessarily behind. As we are confronted by other emerging infectious diseases, it will remain critically important to have an appropriately funded infrastructure in place at the onset.

The CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) for Infectious Diseases grant program, which the SMASH Act would reauthorize, is a primary support system for state and local public health agencies to confront emerging infectious diseases. ELC provides both financial and technical assistance and leads to enhanced prevention as well as more rapid response to outbreaks. The program is currently utilized by 64 grantees in all 50 states and several territories.

We believe that your bill is a positive step towards adequately preparing for and responding to mosquito-borne diseases. Thank you for your leadership in promoting public health. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff on these critical issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johan S. Bakken MD, PhD". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Johan S. Bakken, MD, PhD, FIDSA
President, IDSA