

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
The Honorable Richard Burr, Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

As you continue to develop the PREVENT Pandemics Act, we urge you to include the text of the bipartisan Bolstering Infectious Outbreaks (BIO) Pandemic Workforce Act (S. 3244) because the eventual success of your legislation depends upon the availability of a fully-staffed, interdisciplinary expert health care workforce focused on bio-preparedness and infectious diseases (ID) in every community.

S. 3244 would establish a new student loan repayment program and is a non-specialty-specific, non-disease specific solution for workforce shortages that severely limit our preparedness. The bill directly addresses financial barriers that prevent health care professionals from pursuing careers in bio-preparedness and infectious disease, including physicians, pharmacists, physician assistants, advanced practice registered nurses, clinical laboratory professionals, infection preventionists and dentists.

Loan repayment would be available to individuals who spend at least 50 percent of their time engaged in bio-preparedness and response activities anywhere in the U.S. or 50 percent of their time providing ID care in medically underserved communities and federally funded facilities. The bill will address the overall shortage and also help increase the number of bio-preparedness and ID professionals from populations underrepresented in health care, as a diverse workforce is critical to promoting health equity and enabling the resiliency of vulnerable communities.

A broad and diverse spectrum of ID and bio-preparedness professionals is vital to a rapid, effective response to ID disease outbreaks and to provide ID care. However, bio-preparedness and infectious diseases health care professionals face significant recruitment challenges and shortages:

- [208 million Americans live in areas with little or no access to an ID physician](#), and the distribution of ID physicians is geographically skewed. Thus, rural Americans are less likely to have access to ID physicians than their urban counterparts.
- Only 70% of ID training programs filled their slots in 2021, far less than other disciplines, and an average [medical student debt](#) of \$241,900 incentivizes entry into more lucrative specialties.
- [25% of health care facilities have reported a vacant infection preventionist position](#), and 40% of the infection preventionist workforce will enter retirement age in the next 10 years.
- Clinical microbiologists, who are central to diagnostic testing, were in short supply prior to the current pandemic and the shortage has worsened. Results of a [survey](#) published in 2019 showed a total vacancy rate in this area of 10.14%.

Our organizations urge you to include the bipartisan BIO Preparedness Workforce Act in the PREVENT Pandemics Act and we look forward to collaborating with you on this vital issue.

Thank you for your leadership on this critically important issue.

Sincerely,

African American Health Alliance
AIDS Foundation Chicago
American Academy of HIV Medicine
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases
American Dental Association
American Medical Association
American Pharmacy Cooperative, Inc.
American Society for Microbiology
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
CAEAR Coalition
California Medical Association
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
HealthHIV
HIV Dental Alliance
HIV Medicine Association
Hope House of St. Croix Valley
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Infectious Diseases Society of Ohio
John Snow, Inc. (JSI)
Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security
Johns Hopkins School of Nursing
Johns Hopkins University
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine
Massachusetts Infectious Diseases Society
Massachusetts Medical Society
NASTAD
National Coalition for LGBTQ Health
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Medical Association
National Rural Health Association
National Working Positive Coalition
Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society
Peggy Lillis Foundation
Physician Assistant Education Association
Ryan White Medical Providers Coalition
Sepsis Alliance
SisterLove, Inc.
Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists

The AIDS Institute
Tufts Medical Center
VAC | Westbrook Clinics
Valley AIDS Council
Washington University in St. Louis
Wisconsin Hospital Association
Yale School of Medicine, Section of Infectious Disease