

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 8, 2016

## VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Nicole Lurie, M.D.  
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness & Response  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Assistant Secretary Lurie:

I know you share my concern about the Zika threat and the need to protect mothers and children. That is why I was troubled to read about the slow distribution, by the federal government, of available funds to combat Zika.

On April 6, 2016 the administration announced that \$589 (\$510 million from unspent Ebola funding) million had been found available to be quickly redirected to be spent on a Zika response<sup>1</sup>.

Yet, as of today, only \$112 million – approximately one-fifth of the \$589 million dollars available has been distributed<sup>2</sup>. Three months seems to be a long time to wait to respond to an impending outbreak.

Like many of my colleagues, I find it frustrating that this administration isn't better prepared for emergency illnesses. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) was created under the Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA). It is my understanding that the mission of ASPR is to focus the national efforts on preparedness and response to public health emergencies and medical disasters. For FY16, ASPR requested a total of over \$1.7 billion, including \$110 million to "provide immediate response to an unanticipated public health emergency in which rapid action would be critical to mitigate health impacts."<sup>3</sup> Despite that, Congress had to approve \$5.4 billion in emergency funding for Ebola late in 2014<sup>4</sup> and then the Senate had to approve another \$1.1 billion in emergency funding for Zika this year<sup>5</sup>.

Currently, there is an outbreak of another mosquito-borne disease in Angola – yellow fever. With the global travel, this could become another significant outbreak.

1 <http://www.crs.gov/Reports/R44549>

2 <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/zika-virus-funds-congress-fight-225183>

3 <http://www.phe.gov/about/ofpa/Documents/bib-2016.pdf>

4 <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-12-10/congress-nearly-grants-obama-s-ebola-wish-list-with-5-4b>

5 <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/zika-virus-funding-senate-house-223282>

Americans want the assurance that the tax money they send to Washington is not spent in a reckless or haphazard way.

With this in mind, would you please answer the following questions?

1. Please explain why it has taken months from the time funds available were identified and the eventual distribution of those funds to combat Zika.
2. Is there a strategic plan at the ASPR for addressing outbreaks of illnesses?
3. What are the different types of disease outbreaks to which ASPR responds?
4. How does the ASPR prioritize these types of disease outbreaks in terms of funding?
5. What are the contingency funding plans of the ASPR in order to be able to respond in a timely manner to unexpected outbreaks?
6. What contingency plans does the ASPR have in order to have sufficient yellow fever vaccine available should that need arise?

A written response to these questions is requested by July 29, 2016. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Karen Summar, my Health Policy Director at (202) 224-3744.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley  
Chairman Senate Judiciary Committee

CC: Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Honorable Sylvia Burwell  
Director Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Thomas Frieden

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