

Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense

Representative Susan Brooks
1505 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Anna Eshoo
241 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

February 11, 2016

Dear Representatives Brooks and Eshoo,

As co-chairs of the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense, we write to offer our support for H.R. 3299, the *Strengthening Public Health Emergency Response Act of 2015*.

Last October, our Panel released its comprehensive report, *A National Blueprint for Biodefense: Leadership and Major Reform Needed to Optimize Efforts*. For a year, we worked to examine the state of U.S. biodefense. We found significant effort and progress hampered by insufficient high-level leadership and strategic focus. We believe that this deficit has led to challenges in three areas of our domestic biodefense policy: interagency coordination, stakeholder collaboration, and technological innovation. Shortfalls have resulted in challenges at the department and agency level that compromise America's public health security.

The House Committee on Energy and Commerce has been responsible for the passage of critically important legislation, including the *Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act* and its reauthorization. Your bill, H.R. 3299, would further strengthen the statutory underpinnings of biological preparedness by addressing certain unresolved issues. For example, the Ebola events of 2015 revealed specific weaknesses in hospital readiness and medical countermeasure (MCM) availability. H.R. 3299 would: ensure that the Hospital Preparedness Program operates optimally; assure that the funding Congress allocates to this program reaches its intended recipients; eliminate bureaucratic delays in contracting and providing incentives for MCM development; and enplace a plan for the stockpiling of needed MCM.

As Ebola, Zika, and avian influenza prominently emphasize, the fight against infectious disease has been and will continue to be long and sustained. In *A National Blueprint for Biodefense*, we identify specific opportunities for Congress and the Administration to improve our preparedness for such biological events. Many of these actions, like those in your bill, can be implemented in the near term. Passage of H.R. 3299 would meet at least four of our recommendations – 19a, 19b, 29a, and 29c – while adding value in additional areas. We strongly believe that Congress can facilitate measureable progress in our nation's readiness by pursuing the provisions of H.R. 3299. We, therefore, encourage your committee to deliberate on this legislation as soon as possible.

We look forward to working with you in the coming year to implement these and other recommendations of the Study Panel. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. You may reach us through the Panel's co-directors, Ellen Carlin (ellen.carlin@biodefensstudy.org, 202-669-7830) and Asha George (asha.george@biodefensstudy.org, 301-351-5723).

Sincerely,



Joseph I. Lieberman
Chair



Thomas J. Ridge
Chair