

Statement of Representative David Trone (MD-06)
House Committee on Appropriations Member Day
June 23, 2020

Thank you Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Committee on Appropriations during Member Day. As you draft the Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations bills, I would like to highlight a few priorities that are essential to my district and to the success of our nation as we navigate incredibly difficult circumstances. We face a reckoning with systemic racial injustice in our country at the same time we are forced to confront a global pandemic, and these factors will necessarily inform the work of the Committee as you weigh how this must be reflected in the federal government's spending.

America had been experiencing a mental health crisis before the pandemic, but the situation has only worsened with COVID-19. The Disaster Distress Hotline saw an 891% increase in calls from March 2019 to March 2020, and over half of U.S. adults said in a recent poll that worry or stress from COVID-19 has led to at least one negative effect on their mental health and wellbeing. We have less data to evaluate the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on children, but we know that, in general, one in four youth (or 35 million Americans) experience a traumatic incident before the age of 16. In the last four months, almost without exception, children's routines have been disrupted, they have been subject to extended out-of-school time as well as social distancing, and they have been exposed to new psychological stressors. Children who experience adverse events are more likely to suffer from chronic health problems and mental illness as an adult. Those who have more than four traumatic experiences are twice as likely to not complete high school, ten times as likely to misuse drugs, and twelve times more likely to commit suicide than their peers.

It is now more important than ever that the Appropriations Committee fund new grants created by the SUPPORT Act (P.L. 115-271) to expand evidence-based trauma support services in schools to improve access to research-supported interventions. The law authorizes the Secretary of Education, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary of Mental Health and Substance Use, to make grants to link educational agencies with mental health systems to increase student access to services. Students should have access to these interventions so they can strengthen resiliency and recover from potential additional adverse experiences linked to the COVID-19 crisis when they return to school. Schools should provide a safe space for youth, and it is essential to equip our educational settings with as many resources as possible to support vulnerable communities. **An appropriation of \$50 million is needed to establish and evaluate these critical grants to support our educational system as it helps mitigate the impact of trauma that too many of our students endure.**

I speak often about the necessity of long-term thinking in governing because it is what sets us up for success in providing for our children and our children's children. Viewed from this perspective, one of the smartest investments we can make is in the National Institutes of Health (NIH). **I believe it is necessary to appropriate at least \$44.7 billion in Fiscal Year 2021 for NIH to fully support the innovation we need to ensure the United States remains a global scientific leader.** NIH plays a key role in domestic job creation, economic growth, and bettering the lives of millions of Americans. As we have all seen with the recent focus on the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), NIH is central to our mitigation, treatment of, and recovery from COVID-19.

But their work extends far beyond this current crisis. The National Institute on Aging (NIA) is undertaking groundbreaking research on Alzheimer's, a disease that is expected to grow from 5.6 million Americans today to 13.8 million by 2050. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is mapping the brain chemistry involved in various types of substance use disorder. The National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) are testing interventions to address racial inequities in the delivery of mental health care, with an eye toward reducing the alarming increase of suicides among Black youth. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) is leading the Cancer Moonshot to accelerate progress in finding a cure for cancer. None of this is possible without consistent funding from Congress, but our aim should not just be to provide level funding. A reliable increase in funds from year to year will enable NIH to make exponential progress that impacts every sector of our society.

Finally, I would like to highlight the important work of two institutions in my district, and how they are contributing to our nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Research at the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center (NBACC) at Fort Detrick has helped to establish how long COVID-19 virus can survive on everyday surfaces, how its transmission is affected by temperature and humidity, and the potentially lethal virus load contained in microscopic saliva droplets. The United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), also at Fort Detrick, has been instrumental in developing responses to other highly infectious diseases like Ebola and Zika. Scientists there first received COVID-19 samples in February, and since that time, have been conducting research that will help develop a vaccine and calibrate COVID-19 testing. In a press conference following his March 17 visit to Fort Detrick, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper praised the "incredible

capabilities” of the scientists at USAMRIID, saying, “[i]f anybody knows how to do it, they know how to do it.” These institutions illustrate the essential role government research plays in our response to the global pandemic and why it is essential that we continue to invest in scientific capabilities.

For these reasons, **I urge the Committee to fully fund Biothreat Characterization Research & Development at the FY20 level of \$18,427,000, instead of the President’s request, which would amount to a decrease of \$8,427,000.** All of us have personally experienced the impacts of the COVID-19 biological threat, some much more deeply than others in terms of lives lost, and we must ensure that, as a nation, we are fully prepared to mitigate this current outbreak and combat future ones. In addition, **I ask that the Committee emphasize, through report language, the importance of medical research and maintaining a highly-skilled workforce of scientists and researchers through accounts like Operations & Maintenance within the Defense Health Agency and Army Futures Command.** Some of the most difficult and essential research must be conducted by government institutions because, while there may not be enough profit motive for private companies to be involved, there is an overwhelming national interest in preparedness. COVID-19 has thrown this into stark relief.

Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, and members of the Committee -- thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I look forward to working with you to ensure that Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations reflect our priorities and needs as Americans in a time that presents innumerable challenges but also rays of hope for positive change.