June 10, 2019

Chairman Frank Pallone
Energy & Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write in support of provisions in the Leading Infrastructure For Tomorrow’s America Act (LIFT America Act) to invest in America’s public health infrastructure. Public health is a crucial part of the nation’s essential infrastructure, and investing in it will save lives and money.

All too often, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and health departments are under-resourced and under-staffed. A recent report by Trust for America’s Health, The Impact of Chronic Underfunding on America’s Public Health, found that chronic underfunding has presented a consistent obstacle that is preventing the public health system from adequately tackling leading health threats. America spends about $3.5 trillion on healthcare, less than three percent of which supports governmental public health. In fact, a study out of the University of Kentucky estimated a total shortfall of about $13 per person – or $4.5 billion for the entire nation – to implement comprehensive public health capabilities. As recent public health crises, like the measles outbreaks and substance misuse epidemic, have shown, a comprehensive, well-resourced public health system and workforce is needed for effective responses.

The CDC as well as state, local, tribal and territorial health departments, public health laboratories, and community partners need a well-functioning infrastructure to prevent and respond to major health harms. That infrastructure includes facilities and equipment, such as governmental laboratories; up-to-date data and information systems; and a highly skilled and qualified workforce - including those who are the front lines when a deadly infectious disease or dangerous environmental hazard needs to be contained. The LIFT America Act would authorize funding for cross-cutting core public health and laboratory infrastructure, rather than funding disease-specific capabilities, enabling public health to be nimble in prevention of and response to a range of emerging health conditions. The legislation would invest in workforce capacity and competency, laboratory systems, health information systems, communications, financing and other critical components.

In addition, the success of public health relies upon accurate and timely data, but there are health departments that are still communicating time-sensitive information the way they did a half century ago– by phone, fax and paper. Public health information systems are dependent on outdated technology, systems that are not interoperable, and lack of adequately trained workforce. These outdated systems are delaying public health’s ability to detect outbreaks, communicate with clinicians, and target interventions to prevent disease. The LIFT America Act authorizes critical investments in the public health data infrastructure to transform the speed and accuracy of public health surveillance. Doing so will enable faster detection and containment of outbreaks, with fewer cases – saving lives and reducing delays in response.
As the Zika, Ebola and H1N1 outbreaks, opioid epidemic, natural disasters and rise in chronic diseases have demonstrated, health threats are increasing in frequency and severity, undermining the nation’s economic and health security. U.S. life expectancy has declined for the third year in a row, the longest sustained decline in expected life span since 1918.\textsuperscript{vii} A pandemic could cost the U.S. economy as much as $45 billion.\textsuperscript{viii} And an unhealthy workforce adds billions in direct and indirect costs to the healthcare system and economy. Yet, public health systems and program spending have been shown to have a positive return on investment and improvement in health outcomes – including reducing preventable deaths.\textsuperscript{ix, x, xi} But public health must have the resources to modernize.

Public health is as critical to the nation’s success as roads, bridges, and communications systems. We stand ready to work with Congress to authorize and fund these transformative investments in public health infrastructure.

Sincerely,

AES Consulting
African American Health Alliance
Alameda County (CA) Health Care Services Agency
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
All Youth Access
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA)
American Public Health Association
American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene
American Thoracic Society
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Benzie Leelanau (MI) District Health Department
Big Cities Health Coalition
Boulder County Public Health
Cardiometabolic Research Institute
Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP)
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Central Michigan Regional Rural Health Network
Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials
Community Action, Service & Advocacy (CASA)
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families
Doctors for America
Dorchester County Health Department
Element Health, Inc.
George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Healthcare Ready
Health Care Systems Research Network
Health Department of Northwest Michigan
Health Resources in Action
Hepatitis Education Project
Hispanic Health Initiatives, Inc. (HHI)
HLN Consulting, LLC
Hogg Foundation for Mental Health
Hope Whispers Community Organization Inc.
Immunization Action Coalition
Impetus – Let’s Get Started, LLC
Institute For Professional Education
Jefferson County (CO) Public Health
Kitsap (WA) Public Health District
Lake County (IL) Health Department and Community Health Center
Lawrence-Douglas County (KS) Health Department
Louisiana Public Health Association
Maine Public Health Association
March of Dimes
Mary Ann Liebert Inc.
Maryland Public Health Association
Mental Health America of Kentucky
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Michigan Public Health Institute
Minneapolis Health Department
Mississippi Urban League, Inc.
MQ Foundation
NASTAD
National Association for Health and Fitness
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials
National Athletic Trainers' Association
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Nurse-Led Care Consortium
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable
National WIC Association
NC Public Health Association
New Jersey Association of County and City Health Officials
New Jersey Environmental Health Organization
New Jersey Public Health Association
New Progressive Alliance
cc: Members of the House Energy & Commerce Committee


