

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February XX, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Blunt, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Murray:

As you work to assemble the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations, we urge you to prioritize robust funding for Lyme and other tick-borne disease research and prevention initiatives and thank you for your past support to increase funding for this vital research.

Lyme disease is not only the most common tick-borne disease, but also the most common vector-borne disease with its incidence rate increasing significantly since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reporting began in 1991. From 2004 to 2018, reported cases of tick-borne diseases more than doubled from 22,527 to 47,743 cases. Yet, the CDC estimates that the actual number of cases is approximately 10 times higher, and may be well above 450,000 cases annually. Still, even less is known about the prevalence of Post-Treatment Lyme Disease Syndrome, also known as chronic Lyme disease – a recent Brown University study estimated that the prevalence may reach 1.9 million Americans in 2020. The drastic economic cost to the United States is approximately \$1.3 billion each year in direct medical costs, and \$75 billion annually in indirect costs.

There are still many questions surrounding Lyme and other tick-borne diseases due to significant gaps in funding and research. In October 2019, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) published the NIH Strategic Plan for Tick-borne Disease Research. This plan outlines priorities in prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and improving understanding of tick-borne diseases. We urge you to make Lyme and other tick-borne disease research a priority at the NIH to ensure that the Strategic Plan is swiftly implemented.

Simultaneously, we need to invest in the proper infrastructure to equip states with the necessary tools to combat the rise in Lyme and other tick-borne diseases as well. To ensure that our federal investment in biomedical research reaches communities, we request full funding for the bipartisan Kay Hagan Tick Act, which the President signed into law on December 21, 2019

as part of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 (PL 116-94). This new law is named after the late Senator Kay Hagan, who tragically died from Powassan virus, a tick-borne disease this past October. Headed by the Secretary of Health and Human Services in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the law provides a unified approach with leadership at the federal level and resources at the local level to combat the escalating burden of tick and vector-borne diseases and disorders in the United States.

We understand the challenges you face in setting FY 2021 appropriations levels, and we thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact us or have your staff contact Sarah Khasawinah (Sarah_Khasawinah@aging.senate.gov) and Adam Schiff (Adam_Schiff@smith.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator