

May 31, 2024

The Honorable Brad Wenstrup  
Chair  
Select Subcommittee on  
the Coronavirus Pandemic  
Committee on Oversight and Accountability  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Raul Ruiz  
Ranking Member  
Select Subcommittee on  
the Coronavirus Pandemic  
Committee on Oversight and Accountability  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Wenstrup and Ranking Member Ruiz:

As the subcommittee holds its June 3 hearing with Dr. Anthony Fauci, the undersigned public health and medical organizations write to urge you to use this opportunity to work in a bipartisan manner to explore how Congress can best support our nation's public health workforce and strengthen our long-neglected public health infrastructure. We urge the subcommittee and all members of Congress to fully support our nation's public health system and workforce at the federal, state, local, tribal and territorial levels and to stand against efforts to weaken the ability of the nation's public health agencies to protect the nation's health.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have benefited greatly through the life-saving work of the nation's health care workers and public health professionals as scientists worked to develop safe and effective vaccines at record speed, saving millions of lives. At the same time, the pandemic highlighted our long-neglected public health infrastructure and the strain on our woefully underfunded federal, state, tribal, local, and territorial health agencies. We have despaired as misinformation has spread, costing lives and livelihoods. As we deal with the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, and other new and emerging health threats, the critical role of public health must be prioritized by Congress with an intense focus on renewing and rebuilding our public health infrastructure and workforce.

The nation's public health officials are on the front lines everyday working to improve and protect the health of all of our communities. Unfortunately, during the pandemic, public health professionals who promoted and worked to implement evidence-informed public health measures were contradicted or unfairly challenged as they carried out their responsibilities. Some of these dedicated professionals have been harassed or threatened for doing their work and a substantial number of professionals have been fired, have retired early or have terminated their employment due to fear for themselves and their families and inability to protect the communities they serve.<sup>1234</sup> Additionally, the authority of some state and local public health agencies is being curtailed. Most recently, between May of 2022 to December 2023, 14 states have passed laws that limit public health authority, reallocate public health authority, limit the state enforcement of federal law, limit public health measures or preempt public health measures.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of many in the public health workforce. In a survey of more than 26,000 workers taken during the pandemic, more than half said they had experienced symptoms of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal ideation.<sup>6</sup> Our leaders in Congress must step up and call out these efforts to block public health

authority and the harassment of the workforce. We urge you to use this and other opportunities to help educate our communities and your constituents about the important role public health plays in protecting our nation from health threats and improving the public's health overall.

While the public health system was highly visible during the pandemic, we must remember that this system of dedicated health professionals is hard at work every day, implementing protections and programs to keep the nation safe. Among its many responsibilities, the nation's public health workforce helps ensure our food supply is safe, educates and promotes access to childhood vaccines, implements programs to prevent chronic diseases like cancer, heart and lung disease and diabetes, prevents childhood lead poisoning, prevents birth defects and protects the most vulnerable in our communities from health impacts of extreme heat, wildfires and vector-borne diseases. Additionally, we are currently faced with many new and ongoing health challenges including drug overdose and gun violence epidemics, the H5N1 bird flu outbreak in poultry and dairy cows and at least three human infections, and more than 8 measles outbreaks have been recorded so far in 2024, with 21 states reporting at least one case.

We know there are concrete steps that Congress can take support and strengthen our public health system. These include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring robust and sustained annual funding for our federal public health agencies including the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [Health Resources and Services Administration](#) and others;
- Fully funding HRSA's [Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program and the Bio-Preparedness Workforce Pilot Program](#)
- Reauthorizing and strengthening the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act to give CDC the authorities it needs to collect public health data directly from healthcare providers, public health and clinical laboratories, state, local and tribal public health departments, and other entities, as to ensure the nation's public health system at all levels can respond adequately to emergencies and other threats in a timely manner;
- Providing continued funding to CDC to [modernize the nation's public health data systems](#);
- Authorize [mandatory funding for an adult vaccine program](#) to ensure that the 1 in 10 uninsured adults in the U.S. have access to recommended preventative vaccines; and
- Providing additional long-term annual mandatory funding for CDC and state, local, tribal, and territorial public health agencies for core public health infrastructure activities by passing the [Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act](#).

As public health advocates, we stand ready to work with Congress on these and other efforts to improve the nation's public health system, strengthen the workforce and protect the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

Addiction Professionals of North Carolina  
American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research  
American Association of Colleges of Nursing

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine  
American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American College of Clinical Pharmacy  
American College of Physicians  
American Lung Association  
American Medical Women's Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society for Clinical Pathology  
American Society for Microbiology  
American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene  
Arizona Public Health Association  
Association for Diagnostics & Laboratory Medicine  
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC)  
Association of Accredited Public Health Programs  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health  
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
Big Cities Health Coalition  
CAEAR Coalition  
California Consortium of Addiction Programs & Professionals  
Children's Environmental Health Network  
Connecticut Certification Board  
Connecticut Public Health Association  
Delaware Academy of Medicine/Delaware Public Health Association  
District of Columbia Public Health Association  
Endocrine Society  
Entomological Society of America  
Faces & Voices of Recovery  
Gerontological Society of America  
GO2 for Lung Cancer  
Healthy Teen Network  
HIV Medicine Association  
IC&RC  
Illinois Public Health Association  
Indiana Public Health Association  
Infectious Diseases Society of America  
International WELL Building Institute  
Iowa Public Health Association  
Kansas Public Health Association  
Lakeshore Foundation  
Maryland Public Health Association  
Medical Students for a Sustainable Future (MS4SF)  
Mental Health America of Hawaii

Midwest Center of Excellence for Vector-Borne Disease  
Mississippi Public Health Association  
Missouri Public Health Association  
Mosquito and Vector Control Association of California  
National Association of County and City Health Officials  
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials  
National Athletic Trainers' Association  
National Behavioral Health Association of Providers  
National Coalition of STD Directors  
National Environmental Health Association  
National League for Nursing  
National Network of Public Health Institutes  
National Rural Health Association  
NC Public Health Association  
Nevada Public Health Association  
New Jersey Public Health Association (NJPHA)  
New York State Public Health Association  
Northeast Mosquito Control Association  
Northeast Regional Center for Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases  
Ohio Public Health Association  
Oregon Public Health Association  
Pacific Southwest Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases  
Pennsylvania Public Health Association  
Prevent Blindness  
Prevention Institute  
Public Health Institute  
Safe States Alliance  
Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America  
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine  
South Dakota Public Health Association (SDPHA)  
Southeastern Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases (SECVBD)  
Tennessee Public Health Association  
The AIDS Institute  
Trust for America's Health  
Utah Public Health Association  
Vaccinate Your Family  
Vermont Public Health Association  
Washington State Public Health Association  
WE Public Health  
Wisconsin Public Health Association

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<sup>1</sup> American Public Health Association Policy Statement 20228- Preserving Public Health Capacity by Protecting the Workforce and Authority. Adopted November 8, 2022. <https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2023/01/18/Preserving-Public-Health-Capacity>.

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<sup>2</sup> Royster, J., Meyer, J. A., Cunningham, M. C., Hall, K., Patel, K., McCall, T. C., & Alford, A. A. (2024). Local public health under threat: Harassment faced by local health department leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Public Health in Practice*, 100468.

<sup>3</sup> Burke, R. V., Distler, A., McCall, T. C., Hunter, E., Dhapodkar, S., Chiari-Keith, L., & Alford, A. A. (2023). An analysis of public health officials' experience in California during COVID-19: Priorities and recommendations. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11, 1175661.

<sup>4</sup> McCall, T. C., Alford, A. A., Cunningham, M. C., Hall, K., & Royster, J. (2023). The role of harassment of local public health professionals in mental or emotional well-being and intentions to leave an organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 29 (S1), S45-S47. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PHH.0000000000001655>.

<sup>5</sup> Temple University Center for Public Health Law Research (December 21, 2023). "Laws Addressing Public Health Authority to Respond to Emergencies". LawAtlas.org. <http://Lawatlas.org/datasets/laws-addressing-public-health-authority-to-respond-to-emergencies>.

<sup>6</sup> Bryant-Genevier J, Rao CY, Lopes-Cardozo B, et al. Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Suicidal Ideation Among State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Public Health Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, March–April 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021;70:1680–1685. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7048a6>.