Testimony of the
Vector-Borne Disease Network
On
Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Submitted to the
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
March 1, 2021

On behalf of the Vector-Borne Disease Network, we write to express our strong support for efforts related to vector-borne diseases (VBD) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). **We urge you to provide at least $10.0 billion for CDC in the fiscal year (FY) 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bills, with at least $82.603 million funding for CDC's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases (DVBD), in order to fully fund the $30 million authorized by the *Kay Hagan TICK Act* for that work. We also urge you to provide $100 million in FY 2022 to the CDC for data modernization.**

The past year has demonstrated the importance of public health preparedness, and no agency is more central to that than the CDC. With more people spending time outside last year and this year to safely distance from friends and family in order to reduce the risk of Covid-19 exposure, increases the risk of exposure to other diseases spread by insects and arthropods like ticks and mosquitoes if individuals don't take appropriate steps to protect themselves. And while Covid-19 in many cases will likely lead to long term negative health consequences for many of those who are exposed, so too will exposure to VBDs that aren't appropriately diagnosed and treated. We are grateful for strong Congressional support for VBD programs in recent years and believe that ongoing investments in this area are crucial for combatting the escalating burden of VBD, perhaps now more than ever before.

The Vector-Borne Disease Network is a stakeholder group of non-profit organizations led by the Entomological Society of America (ESA) that aims to reduce human and animal suffering caused by arthropod disease vectors. Many notorious public health threats, such as Lyme disease, Zika virus, malaria, and West Nile virus, are transmitted by arthropod vectors like ticks and mosquitoes. Between 2004 and 2016, reported human disease cases in the U.S. resulting from bites from arthropod vectors tripled.[1] Meanwhile, nine new pathogens spread by ticks and mosquitoes were discovered or introduced in that same timeframe. Disease vectors also pose significant threats to both livestock and companion animals. Because both the underlying causes of and potential solutions for these trends are varying and complex, robust and dedicated funding for addressing challenges in VBD is needed now more than ever.

Kay Hagan Tick Act: Our coalition is highly appreciative of the $6 million to support the *Kay Hagan TICK Act* that was provided in the FY 2021 omnibus, and our ask for FY 2022 is for an additional $24 million on top of the FY 2021 discretionary budget of $58.603 million for the **CDC's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases (DVBD)** to fully fund the amount authorized by Congress at **$82.603 million**. The Kay Hagan

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/vector-borne/index.html

Tick Act supports two key programs essential to VBD prevention, surveillance, testing, and response activities, the CDC Regional Centers of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases and CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant program.

> The *Kay Hagan TICK Act* authorized the program at **$10 million per year** for the **CDC Regional Centers of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases** which supports five centers across the country. Full funding is important to support this novel program which increases the coordination between academic institutions and state and local departments of health to ensure research findings and information are getting out into the community more rapidly, support surveillance efforts, and promote outreach and education.
>
> The **CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant program** is particularly important for efforts related to the surveillance, detection, response, and prevention of infectious diseases, including VBD. Last year the CDC's DVBD received requests for nearly $50 million from the state departments of health for VBD through the ELC program. However, the DVBD was only able to support $18.2 million, roughly a third of the needed resources to address VBD across the nation. The *Kay Hagan TICK ACT* authorizes **$20 million** and that still won't come close to meeting needs at the state level.

Providing the full level of funding authorized by these important pieces of legislation would be highly effective in facilitating the development and implementation of a national strategy to combat VBD.

Strengthening Mosquito Abatement for Safety and Health (SMASH) Act: While the Kay Hagan Tick Act, authorized $20 million for the ELC grants, the *Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act,* Section 607, the Strengthening Mosquito Abatement for Safety and Health (SMASH), authorized a total of $100 million for the ELC grants related to vector management. $20 million in the *Kay Hagan Tick Act* would be an improvement, but the state, county, and local departments of health remain vastly underfunded and this creates a workforce challenge as budgets fluctuate from year to year. Sustained, robust investment in public health infrastructure, including the workforce, is necessary to be prepared to respond to the next pandemic, which could very well be one spread by insects instead of the air. As a nation we were reminded this year that it is critical to have a well-funded and supported capacity before a crisis, we cannot successfully develop one in the middle of an emergency.

Data Modernization: The VBDN also appreciates Congressional support for data modernization at the CDC which was supported at $50 million in FY 2020 and 2021, and the $500 million included in last year's CARES Act. The need for sustained support for data infrastructure is critical to modernize healthcare in this nation as public health data currently remains siloed from other healthcare data. Connecting public health labs to other parts of the health care system is essential to our ability to create the ability to respond to a detected outbreak in real-time and thus respond accordingly to an emerging public health threat to the nation, region, or state. As diseases and insects don't respect county, state, or territorial boundaries, a robust data infrastructure will be the only way to meaningfully protect the U.S. against future biological threats. Sec. 2823 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 authorized **$100 million** a year for the next five years **for data infrastructure** and we strongly encourage Congress to fully fund those needs at that level.

CDC is the first line of defense for our nation's health, safety, and security, and it is crucial that the agency has the resources it needs to protect Americans from serious threats like VBD. On behalf of our coalition of stakeholders invested in the mission to reduce the ongoing as well as emerging threats posed by ticks, mosquitoes, and other arthropod vectors, we thank you for your commitment to this critical issue.