

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 29, 2016

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I applaud and join your call for the rapid development of tests, vaccines, and treatments to fight the Zika virus, as well as public education efforts enabling Americans to protect themselves from infection. Last year, your Budget proposal included a number of provisions for global public health initiatives to fight global disease, protect U.S. health security, and provide maternal and child health care abroad. As you prepare the Budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17), I urge you to again request an increase to global public health and maternal and child health funding to combat the recent outbreak of the mosquito-transmitted Zika virus, which has already spread to 22 countries and territories, as well as increase funding for research related to combatting this terrible disease.

Although the virus causes mild symptoms in general cases — such as fever, conjunctivitis, and headaches — it poses added danger to pregnant women, especially during the first trimester when some women may be unaware of their pregnancy. More than 4,000 cases of microcephaly and birth deformities in infants in Brazil have been linked to the outbreak of the Zika virus. With no vaccine, treatment, or widely accessible diagnostic test, many Latin American countries — such as Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Honduras — have simply urged women to postpone pregnancy. This suggested policy is no solution, especially in countries with a demonstrated problem of sexual assault and rape, along with limited access to basic reproductive and preventive health services. Within our own borders, a dozen Americans have been infected with Zika after visiting countries who experienced a viral outbreak. Although there is so far no evidence the virus has spread to the United States, the Aedes mosquito, which can transmit the virus, is present from Florida to Connecticut and as far west as Illinois.

Research into developing a Zika virus vaccine, diagnostic tests, and treatments must be implemented as a part of an effective strategy to end this harmful epidemic and protect Americans traveling abroad. Furthermore, the United States must continue aid to women in countries where access to public health information and voluntary family planning services are inadequate. I hope that your FY17 Budget proposal will reflect both of these vital priorities.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

Cc: Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services