

August 17, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

As the Committee continues bipartisan discussions to consider lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic response and how to improve the nation's public health infrastructure and medical preparedness and response capabilities at the local, state, and federal levels, we offer bipartisan and bicameral legislation that supports this mission: the *COVID-19 and Pandemic Response Centers of Excellence Act* (S.2307). As testament to the significance and importance of this program, the legislation was introduced by Senators Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY) and Dr. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) with Chairman Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Sen. John Boozman (R-AR) as original cosponsors. The House companion (H.R.4292) was led by Chairwoman Nydia Velázquez (D-NY), member of the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, and Rep. John Katko (R-NY), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Homeland Security.

We write as a coalition of academic medical centers and colleagues that support the creation of a *COVID-19 and Pandemic Response Centers of Excellence* program within the Office of the Secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). During these unprecedented times, academic medical centers like ours have been at the forefront of our nation's fight against COVID-19 by translating both expertise and on-the-ground experience into real-time development of knowledge and actionable measures that have filled in the gaps between a static preparedness infrastructure and a novel virus outbreak.

As witnessed over the past year and a half, the missing link in current public-private programs is the intersection between on-the-ground health care delivery and rapid innovation, translation, and uptake. However, academic medical centers are positioned to be the bridge between stakeholders like government, academia, public health, health care, and private industry, while integrating the needs of their local communities including the most vulnerable and underserved.

The *COVID-19 and Pandemic Response Centers of Excellence* infrastructure is a more efficient and effective approach for rapid response to prevent or mitigate outbreaks. Real-time response and innovation cannot be expedited when approached through siloed or narrowly focused programs or retrospective reimbursement with a six to twelve-month delay. This program will provide advance federal resources needed to support academic medical centers' patient care, cutting-edge research, education, and community outreach as we continue to fight COVID-19 and its long-term impacts, including the array of symptoms referred to as "long COVID" or post-acute sequelae of COVID (PASC).

To receive designation, an institution must be currently engaged in or able to expand its efforts in key areas including:

- availability and accessibility of testing and diagnostics;
- short-term and long-term patient care for COVID-19 survivors;
- the mental health of frontline healthcare workers;
- best practices in the use of supplies and therapeutics;
- collaborations with public and community health entities addressing health equity and health care disparities;

- pre-clinical and clinical research and development;
- early warning and surveillance including One Health principles and genetic sequencing;
- education and training for health professionals, scientists, and communities.

Once designated, the Centers would then serve as an advisory network with other federal agencies and organizations to expedite the real-time development of solutions to complex and concurrently evolving needs. Academic medical centers serve as the nexus for innovation and implementation, and federal resources provided in advance can ensure we fully combat the known and emerging public health ramifications of this widespread crisis and be positioned for better coordination of real-time response needs of the next to protect the wellbeing of all communities.

The *COVID-19 and Pandemic Response Centers of Excellence Act* addresses many of the areas you have set out to improve. We appreciate your consideration of including this legislation in any legislative packages that advance in Congress. We are eager to speak with your offices and the committee and ask that you reach out to Alessia Daniele of Weill Cornell Medicine at ald2035@med.cornell.edu regarding the unique benefits of this program. Thank you for this opportunity to participate and engage in this important initiative.

The COVID-19 and Pandemic Response Centers of Excellence Act has been endorsed by:

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R)
 The Associated Medical Schools of New York (AMSNY)
 Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA)
 Solve M.E/CFS Initiative
 Atrium Health
 Baylor Scott & White Health
 Columbia University Irving Medical Center
 Cornell University
 Houston Methodist
 Johns Hopkins University & Medicine
 Louisiana State University
 Mass General Brigham
 New York-Presbyterian
 NYU Langone Health
 Rutgers - The State University of New Jersey
 Stony Brook University
 The Ohio State University
 The State University of New York (SUNY)
 The University of Utah
 UNC Health & UNC School of Medicine
 University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS)
 University of Iowa Health Care
 University of Rochester Medical Center
 Washington University