

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 17, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500-0003

Dear Mr. President:

I write to urge you to implement a more cohesive strategy to battle the Ebola virus and protect Americans from further exposure. The United States response to the Ebola epidemic has been fragmented, with multiple systemic failures causing harm to Americans. While the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) has been clear the current risk for an outbreak in the United States is low, any error can have fatal consequences. We must improve our public health infrastructure through better coordination of federal and local agencies and educational outreach to the public and be swift in preparing, training, and providing resources for our health care providers.

I welcome your appointment today of a single point-person to coordinate the United States response to the Ebola epidemic. I am pleased you recognize that an effective response to an infectious disease outbreak requires multi-agency and departmental coordination. The CDC, State Department, Department of Transportation, Department of Defense, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, National Institutes of Health, Department of Homeland Security, Federal Aviation Administration, USAID, state and local health departments, and others all have roles to play to prepare for and prevent an Ebola outbreak in the U.S. A so-called czar who coordinates this operation can help make sure we are focused on preventing an outbreak in the U.S., containing the epidemic in West Africa, responding to suspected domestic cases, and preparing to respond an outbreak.

I am very concerned about the recent reports of the mishandling of Ebola patients in Dallas. We know health care providers who come in direct contact with patients are at a higher risk of contracting Ebola. The CDC needs to provide clear direction to providers and public health departments around the country, including updated quarantine procedures and health care worker safety protocol. The CDC and other relevant agencies must provide the necessary education, training, and resources to our health care workers and facilities, to include sanitation workers and support staff, ensuring they are equipped to respond in the small chance there

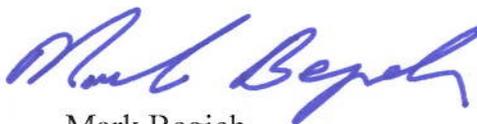
is a local case of Ebola. Our brave health care workers are on the front lines of this response and we must do everything we can to provide them with appropriate training and fail-safe protective equipment.

The recent systemic failures in the treatment and monitoring of those exposed to Ebola have left Americans on high alert and eager for information. I request that your Administration redouble its efforts to share the facts about Ebola and make sure Americans know where to go for reliable, accurate, and up to date information.

I further urge you to continue to assess your current West Africa travel policies. We must consider sensible travel restrictions that help contain the outbreak in West Africa and prevent the spread to the U.S. I urge you to expand health screenings at more international airports that see a high amount of air traffic from around the world, such as Anchorage. This is particularly important should the disease spread to other countries as we will have more inbound flights with potentially contagious passengers. As people arrive from West Africa, it is important to have their local contact information and we must find ways to connect them with state and local public health departments and local health care services.

As a member of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, as well as the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, I want to ensure the agency is prepared and equipped to provide disaster relief. I look forward to redoubling our efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of all Americans.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich
United States Senator