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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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January 28, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you well know, over the last several weeks, multiple cases of the dangerous “Zika” virus have been identified in the United States. We write to better understand what the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is doing to address the spread of the virus and to prepare our country, including state and local public health officials, for any potential outbreak.

Since last May, the Zika virus has spread at an alarming rate throughout a number of Central and South American countries, as well as Puerto Rico. For decades, this virus was believed to cause minor physical symptoms, such as a fever, without much evidence of more severe or life-threatening effects. However, this recent outbreak has coincided with a large uptick in cases of microcephaly, a developmental condition in which affected children are born with abnormally small heads and underdeveloped brains.

Though no official connection has yet been made between the Zika virus and microcephaly, it is our understanding that both Brazilian officials and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified several cases where children born with microcephaly also tested positive for the Zika virus. It is important that the CDC, in partnership with the international community, continue to study any possible links between the two afflictions, and provide the general public with the best information available to avoid contracting Zika or developing microcephaly.

While it appears that the infected individuals here in the United States contracted the virus while traveling abroad, and that the virus is not spreading locally, that may not remain the case. The *Aedes* species of mosquito, which transmits the virus, is prevalent in a large portion of this country so it may only be a matter of time before the number of infections increases here at home.

We commend the proactive approach undertaken by the CDC thus far to investigate the Zika outbreak abroad and alert the public and state and local health officials about the risks associated with the virus. However, we believe more can and should be done to enhance preparedness and ascertain the nature of the threat Zika poses to our country.

The Honorable Jeh Johnson

January 28, 2016

Page 2

To this end, and in light of President Obama's call for urgent action on this matter, we ask that you provide the following information no later than February 11, 2016.

- A description of any plans, discussions or documents pertaining to the Department's coordination with other federal entities, particularly through the National Biosurveillance Integration Center, in tracking the potential spread of Zika in the United States.
- A description of the Department's other current and planned activities, research, policies or programs in support of federal efforts to prepare for, mitigate against, respond to and recover from a potential outbreak of Zika;
- A description of resources and programs currently made available by the Department to state and local officials to raise awareness of, prepare for, mitigate against, respond to and recover from a potential Zika outbreak in the U.S.; and
- An explanation of the criteria and decision-making process that will be used to determine whether to screen passengers for Zika at U.S. ports of entry.


We would appreciate it if you would keep us updated on any further progress or new developments on this rapidly evolving issue. [REDACTED]

With best personal regards, we remain

Sincerely yours,



Ron Johnson
Chairman



Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member