

**Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper**  
**“Preparedness and Response to Public Health Threats: How Ready Are We?”**  
**November 19, 2014**

*As prepared for delivery:*

Today, we will examine our nation’s response to the ongoing Ebola epidemic and our overall preparedness for other public health threats. We are very fortunate to have a great panel of witnesses with us today and I would like to thank all of them for their public service.

Since February, the public has watched an epidemic of the Ebola virus grip the countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and now Mali. To date, roughly 5,200 people in west Africa are believed to have died from the Ebola virus. The actual number of deaths may be significantly higher.

The severity and scale of this outbreak has challenged the world-wide public health community. When I think about the tragedy that is playing out in west Africa and what role we should play, I am reminded of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, where we learn that we should ‘Love our neighbors as ourselves.’

If we don’t take care of our neighbors in Africa, then we may see this deadly disease spread even faster across the world. That is why I believe it is vital that we – along with our international partners – continue to battle Ebola at its epicenter.

Ebola, however – like all infectious diseases – knows no borders. It has even reached our shores. Over the weekend, the United States began treating its tenth patient for Ebola, who sadly passed away on Monday. His death marks the second Ebola-related death here at home.

In light of the Ebola virus epidemic, many Americans have asked the important question: how prepared is our nation to handle a major public health threat? That’s what we hope to answer at today’s hearing.

Our goal for this hearing is not to create needless confusion. Doing that would be counterproductive, potentially putting more people at risk and exacerbating the public’s understandable fear of the disease. Instead, I hope we are able to find lessons learned from our Ebola response, and use them to inform our future response to this disease and others that could threaten our country.

While I know the disease is far from being defeated and has even, as I mentioned earlier, spread to Mali, it’s my understanding the number of cases in Liberia has substantially declined. This is welcome news. However, I know we could see a spike in cases with little notice. As a result, we must continue to pay close attention to the changing dynamics in Africa. And we must continually reassess the scale of the response needed overseas and here in the United States to end this epidemic.

Whether it's the Ebola virus, influenza, or a disease we have yet to hear about, the bottom line is the same: we need to be better prepared and ready to respond. To be most effective, we of course must have a well-coordinated response at the Federal, State and local levels.

We must also have clear guidance and protocols from the Centers for Disease Control and other public health officials so that everyone knows exactly what to do and what not to do. We must also ensure that our state and local health and emergency response professionals have the training and tools they need to succeed. Finally, we must have a strong screening process in place at our ports of entry so we can better identify and monitor high-risk travelers.

I also believe that a critical part of addressing any public health threat is the availability of antivirals, therapeutics and other medical countermeasures. In the case of Ebola, I have been encouraged by the significant progress we have made in the last few months on a vaccine for the virus, as well as therapeutics to treat the disease. I look forward to hearing about the status of these countermeasures and the plan for quickly getting them to people in need.

To help meet the immediate and long term needs of the Ebola epidemic, President Obama recently submitted an emergency funding request of nearly \$6.2 billion dollars. I look forward to hearing more about the request, particularly in light of the changing situation on the ground in Africa.

As we discuss the funding request, I believe we should keep in mind our moral obligation to help "the least of these" in society, and doing so in an effective and fiscally responsible way. In closing, I would just like to acknowledge the work of our witnesses and the countless first responder and health professionals who have stepped up to fight this most recent challenge, and all public health threats. I also want to recognize and thank the non-governmental organizations who are so critical in this world-wide effort to stem the epidemic of Ebola.