

June 7, 2016

Honorable John F. Kerry Secretary of State U.S. Department of State 2201 C Street NW Washington, D.C. 20520

Honorable Ashton Carter Secretary of Defense U.S. Department of Defense 1000 Defense Pentagon Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretaries Kerry and Carter,

The World Health Organization estimates that between three to four million people will become infected with the Zika virus over the next year in the Americas alone. This estimate does not include the countries outside of the Americas, in which the primary vector for Zika - the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito - is also present. In the United States, the number of pregnant women possibly infected with Zika continues to climb to over 340. For civilians and servicemembers, as well as their families, living and serving abroad presents additional risks. The Pentagon recently reported that as of May 20<sup>th</sup>, 11 servicemembers, 4 dependents, and 2 retirees have been infected with Zika since January. With Civil and Foreign Service officers in more than 250 posts around the world and servicemembers in 150 countries, we appreciate the steps the Departments of State and Defense have taken to protect the women, men, and families serving the United States and living in Zika-affected countries, and we urge you to continue supporting policies that put the health and welfare of these civil servants and servicemembers first.

It has been months since the President proposed \$1.9 billion in emergency funding to support the Zika response. After months of delay, Senate Republicans finally agreed to work with Democrats on a bipartisan down payment on the President's proposal, which would direct \$1.1 billion to the Departments of Health and Human Services and State to enhance vector control programs in the United States and its territories, raise public awareness, expand access to preventive health services, and accelerate vaccine development. Unfortunately, House

Republicans introduced a proposal that provides only \$622 million, less than a third of what is needed to meet this public health challenge. In addition, while the bipartisan Senate bill includes dedicated funding for critical prevention, health care, and outreach efforts, including expanding access to family planning services, the House proposal fails to support these priorities, despite their central role in protecting women and families from the Zika virus.

We commend the steps that your Departments have taken already to gain a better understanding of the threat the Zika virus poses to civilians and servicemembers and their families while serving abroad, as well as to educate our citizens living abroad. For example, the Department of Defense's recent allocation of additional funding to military laboratories to expand surveillance of Zika to 18 countries and territories is an important first step in identifying and protecting those at risk of Zika infection. Similarly, your Departments' policies to allow relocation of at-risk employees and servicemembers from Zika-affected areas is commendable, and we urge you to continue this policy.

As we continue to push for quick action to send a strong emergency funding proposal to the President's desk to tackle this virus, we would appreciate greater detail on how your Departments are working to protect servicemembers and civilians living in Zika-affected areas, specifically women and children, and how additional funding from Congress will assist your Departments, both indirectly and directly, in these efforts.

Given the potentially dire health consequences of Zika for women and children, we urge your Departments to continue taking the necessary steps to protect the servicemembers, civilians and their families living and working abroad. Thank you for your consideration of this request.