

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 19, 2014

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
S-221 United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
S-230 United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20150

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Republican Leader McConnell:

The current Ebola epidemic is the worst outbreak of the virus in history and has exposed serious vulnerabilities in our understanding of the disease and our national public health preparedness. In response to the ongoing crisis, the President has issued an emergency appropriations request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 that includes \$6.18 billion to continue the response to help end the Ebola epidemic in Africa, enhance domestic preparedness, accelerate availability of vaccines and therapeutics and strengthen global capability to prevent the spread of infectious diseases before they become epidemics. We have proposed language which would designate funds in this request that will be used domestically to support the establishment of regional designated hospitals that can provide a higher level of specialized care for Ebola patients in an isolated setting. We believe the creation of these designated Ebola treatment centers are a critical component of our nation's preparedness in battling this disease and will help ensure the safety of healthcare workers and future patients.

The two cases of nurses who contracted the Ebola virus while caring for a patient at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital highlighted vulnerabilities in our nations' public health preparedness and raised serious concerns about the ability of local hospitals across the country to treat Ebola patients without exposing healthcare workers to undue risks. We must be prepared to respond immediately and safely to any new domestic cases of Ebola that are found in our healthcare system. There are only four hospitals with biocontainment facilities in the United States, and, together, they have a total of 11 beds that can be used at any one time for Ebola patients.¹ In the event that those facilities become full, it is imperative that we are prepared to isolate and treat newly diagnosed Ebola patients at appropriate alternative locations that are trained, staffed and prepared to provide the specialized treatment for Ebola patients.

Designating hospitals as specialized domestic Ebola treatment centers is critical to our public health response. These treatment centers, among other things, would provide extensive training to all healthcare workers regarding the appropriate safety protocols for Ebola cases, the proper use of personal protective gear and disposal of contaminated waste. These designated hospitals should also be provided extra financial resources that can aid in the expense of preparing their spaces and staff for dealing with the complexities of caring for an Ebola patient.

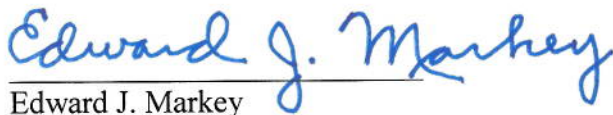
¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/us-capacity-11-ebola-patients-specialized-hospitals/story?id=26251721>

The establishment of these treatment centers would improve our ability to treat any future domestic Ebola cases and other highly infectious diseases in several important ways. First, any new patients diagnosed with Ebola within the United States would immediately be transported to the closest treatment center for care. Each designated treatment center would be equipped with physicians that have expertise in diagnosing and treating infectious diseases such as Ebola, healthcare workers specifically trained to care for Ebola patients, and all of the equipment, training, and resources necessary to treat patients with Ebola safely and effectively.

Including this specific language in the emergency appropriations request for fiscal year 2015 will aid in the establishment of national hospitals prepared to care for Ebola patients and patients with other deadly infectious diseases requiring specialized treatment and isolation. Ensuring that the United States continues to mount a robust, coordinated and sustained response to the Ebola crisis and improving our domestic preparedness is essential to containing this epidemic and reducing the health risks to American citizens.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey


Rob Portman