

United States Senate

July 8, 2021

Chair Patty Murray
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Roy Blunt
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt,

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we request sustained and robust funding for the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to prioritize research needed to develop a universal influenza vaccine. We appreciate your dedicated investments in this important research initiative in Fiscal Years 2018 to 2021, and look forward to working with you to enhance our response to the influenza virus.

More than 80,000 Americans, including 185 children, died during the 2017-2018 flu season, a particularly severe season that devastated families and communities across the country. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and public health interventions to prevent its spread lead to significantly depressed 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 flu seasons, influenza continues to pose a significant risk. In addition to the human toll, influenza costs the nation an estimated \$10.4 billion in direct medical expenses and more than \$87 billion in total economic impact per year.

Despite the consistent, compounding burden influenza places on our families, health care infrastructure, and economy, we lack an effective response to mitigate its effects. CDC estimates that a typical flu vaccine ranges between 10 to 60 percent in effectiveness. We need a vaccine that offers robust protection against a number of flu strains, removing the need to create a suboptimal, stop-gap vaccine every year.

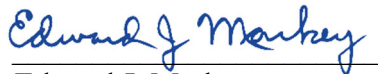
We were pleased that NIAID published its strategic plan to develop a universal influenza vaccine in *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* in 2018, and that the agency is advancing research to develop a suitable vaccine candidate pursuant to this plan. The strategic plan provides a realistic framework by which NIAID can actualize its commitment to developing a universal influenza vaccine. By focusing on research initiatives to better understand the pathogenesis of influenza, the immune response to both influenza infection and vaccination, and different approaches to vaccination, we can propel our primary influenza prevention strategy by creating a more effective vaccine that provides longer, more durable protection.

Influenza is a centuries-old scourge that needs a 21st century response, and investing in research to develop a universal influenza vaccine will help us achieve that important public health goal. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforces the need for a vaccine that would prevent the next pandemic influenza. Therefore, we encourage you to support improving our response to

influenza by providing sustained and robust funding in Fiscal Year 2022 for universal influenza vaccine research.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

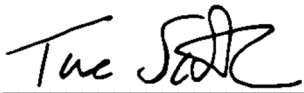
Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



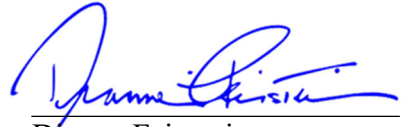
Tina Smith
United States Senator



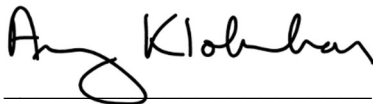
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



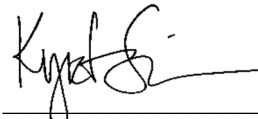
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



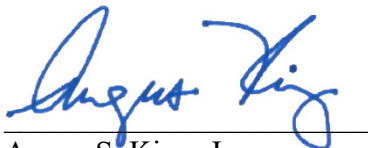
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Krysten Sinema
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator