

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 8, 2018

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
S. 128 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
S. 128 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray,

As you finalize the Fiscal Year 2018 appropriations legislation, we urge you to include report language encouraging 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.

The severity of this year's influenza season was a potent reminder of the annual threat this virus poses to communities across the country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that up to 56,000 Americans will die in a severe flu season. While we still do not know the full effect of this season's influenza, which is now beginning to moderate, we know that at least 114 children have already died from an influenza-associated illness. 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. This season's vaccine is 36 percent effective, and a typical vaccine ranges between 10 to 60 percent in effectiveness. Specifically, the current vaccine is only 25 percent effective against H<sub>3</sub>N<sub>2</sub>, the prominent viral strain in circulation this season that is associated with higher rates of hospitalizations and illness. 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 are pleased that NIAID recently published its strategic plan to develop a universal influenza vaccine in *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*. This strategic plan provides a realistic framework by which NIAID can actualize its commitment to developing a universal influenza vaccine. By

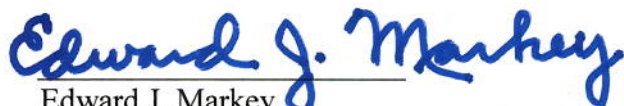
focusing on research initiatives to better understand the pathogenesis of influenza, the immune response to both influenza infection and vaccination, and different approaches to vaccination, we can propel our primary influenza prevention strategy by creating a more effective vaccine that provides longer, durable protection.

Influenza is a centuries-old scourge that needs a 21<sup>st</sup> century response, and investing in research to develop a universal influenza vaccine will help us achieve that important public health goal. Therefore, we encourage you to include the following report language in your Fiscal Year 2018 appropriations:

NIH NIAID influenza prioritization -- *Universal Influenza Vaccine*—The Committee appreciates the investments that NIAID has made and intends to make to improve our response to the seasonal influenza virus. To date, 114 children have died from influenza this season, and the hospitalization rate this season is among the highest since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began collecting these data. In response to the severity of the 2017 - 2018 flu season, the Committee encourages NIAID to continue to prioritize investment in the basic and clinical scientific research necessary to develop a universal influenza vaccine.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



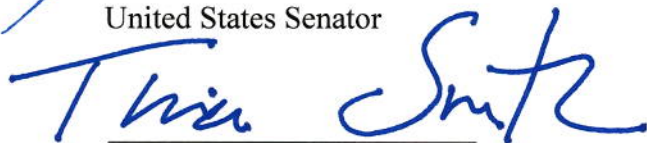
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



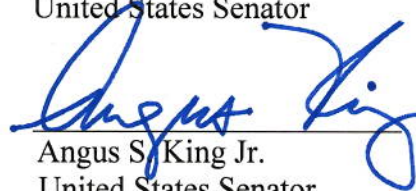
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



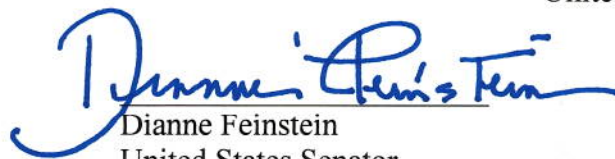
Bill Nelson  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Angus S. King Jr.  
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator