

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

[[DATE]]

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you and your colleagues begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Labor-Health and Human Services-Education appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you fully fund the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program at its authorization level and provide \$50 million to launch the new Bio-Preparedness Workforce Pilot Program.

The state and local public health workforce is the backbone of the nation's governmental public health system but is facing a crisis. In the past decade, state and local health departments lost 15 percent of essential staff and 80,000 more full-time equivalents – an increase of nearly 80 percent – are needed to provide a minimum package of public health services.¹ While all health departments need additional staff, one of the most acute needs is in small local health departments which often serve rural communities.

Without sufficient staff, health departments may not be able to carry out essential services like screening and treatment for both chronic and communicable diseases; maternal and child health services; epidemiology and surveillance; routine immunizations; primary health care prevention services; and regulation, inspection, or licensing. Local and state health departments are also our nation's first line response to public health emergencies. An underinvestment in state and local public health workforce leaves our communities under-prepared to respond to emergencies, including infectious disease outbreaks, environmental hazards, and weather-related events.

Meanwhile, the infectious disease (ID) workforce that works in collaboration with public health is also in crisis. Nearly 80 percent of US counties have no ID physician, and recruitment is dwindling. This year, only 56 percent of ID training programs filled their positions, while most other medical specialties filled all or nearly all of their training programs. ID physicians are among the lowest compensated in medicine, and student loan debt is a key barrier to entering the field. Similar shortages and recruitment challenges exist for infection preventionists, clinical laboratory staff, pharmacists, physician assistants, nurses and other clinicians who specialize in ID.

Last year, Congress recognized the need to bolster both the public health and ID workforces and included in Section 2221 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 bipartisan legislation authorizing both the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program and the Bio-Preparedness Workforce Pilot Program. Congress must now follow through on its commitment and fully fund Section 2221 in Fiscal Year 2024.

With full funding of \$100 million, the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program will promote the recruitment of as many as 2,000 public health professionals at local, state, and Tribal public health

¹ <https://debeaumont.org/staffing-up/>

agencies. Under the program, individuals who have recently graduated or are in their final year of pursuing a public health degree, health professions degree, or relevant certificate may receive up to \$50,000 in educational loan repayment in exchange for a three-year service commitment at a local, state, or Tribal public health agency. Similarly, an allocation of \$50 million for the Bio Preparedness Pilot, also based on bipartisan legislation, offers loan repayment opportunities to ID professional to address severe shortages in the ID workforce.

As your Subcommittee makes funding decisions for FY 2024, we urge you to provide \$100 million to the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program and \$50 million to launch the new Bio-Preparedness Workforce Pilot Program. Such an investment will help our local, state, and Tribal health departments and ID partners rebuild their workforce, which is essential to America's ability to confront current public health challenges and prepare for future crises. The Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program and Pilot Program are commonsense incentives that will help ensure our public health and ID workforce grows and have the staff needed to keep our communities safe and healthy in the years to come.

[[CLOSING]]

[[SIGNATURES]]