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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5401

October 15, 2014

Dr. Thomas R. Frieden
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

The Hon. Jeh Johnson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Nebraska Avenue Center, NW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Director Frieden and Secretary Johnson:

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other federal agencies take new and coordinated steps to prevent the transmission of the Ebola virus in the United States, I write to underscore how imperative it is that such efforts include Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories.

To date, eight individuals diagnosed with Ebola have been treated at three U.S. hospitals—Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia (three patients), Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska (two patients), and Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas, Texas (three patients). Six of these eight individuals contracted the virus in West Africa, including a Liberian man who then took a commercial flight to the United States, sought care at the Dallas hospital, was treated and released without being properly diagnosed, subsequently returned to the hospital with more severe symptoms, and ultimately died. The seventh and eighth affected individuals are health workers who treated the Liberian man at the Dallas hospital and are currently receiving medical care at that same hospital. They are the only individuals known to have contracted the virus within the United States.

Upon confirmation that a patient transmitted Ebola to a health worker at a U.S. hospital, CDC announced that it would implement a series of enhanced measures designed to ensure that health care professionals throughout the United States are trained to properly diagnose individuals who exhibit symptoms of Ebola and to safely and effectively treat—or transfer to another facility—any patient confirmed to have the virus. A CDC spokesperson was quoted as follows:

Certainly this event has given us all a wake-up call that we really need to make sure that front-line health care workers are fully prepared to handle a patient with Ebola. Every U.S. health care facility needs to have the capability to initially handle a case. Even if the patient is going to be transferred to another facility, they need to be able to handle the first moments.¹

¹ See Pam Belluck, “C.D.C. Will Offer More Ebola Training to Health Care Workers,” *N.Y. Times*, Oct. 12, 2014.

As part of the effort to help hospitals be prepared and to help health workers protect themselves in the event that they are confronted with a suspected or confirmed case of Ebola, CDC has indicated that it will provide additional training to hospitals, recommend to hospitals that they administer drills to practice dealing with Ebola patients, issue more specific instructions to health workers for putting on and removing protective equipment, conduct nationwide training conference calls for health workers, and sponsor a training session in New York City on October 21st for nurses, emergency technicians and other health workers that will be live-streamed to hospitals across the country.

It is crucial that these worthy CDC efforts to empower hospitals around the country to diagnose, treat and prevent the spread of Ebola be extended to hospitals in Puerto Rico and the other territories to the same degree that they are made available to hospitals in the states. In the case of Puerto Rico, hospitals are currently facing a significant and unique challenge as a result of the recent outbreak of the mosquito-borne virus chikungunya, so limited local resources are already stretched thin, making the need for federal support to the territory particularly acute.

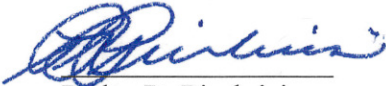
Beyond the provision of training to U.S. hospitals, federal officials are also seeking to minimize the chance that individuals who contracted Ebola in Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone or another country in West Africa will travel to the United States and transmit the virus to U.S. residents. As part of this effort, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—within DHS—has begun screening international travelers for symptoms of Ebola at five “gateway” airports on the U.S. mainland—John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York; Dulles International Airport outside of Washington, D.C.; O’Hare International Airport in Chicago; Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta; and Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey. Although there are no direct flights to the United States from Liberia, Guinea, or Sierra Leone, it has been reported that nearly 95 percent of U.S.-bound passengers from those three countries arrive through these five airports.

I understand that federal officials will continually evaluate whether enhanced screenings are appropriate at U.S. airports beyond these five gateway airports. As you undertake this analysis, I ask you to bear in mind that Puerto Rico is home to six federally-designated ports of entry, including Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport, which receives direct flights from locations in Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean and throughout the United States. I want to ensure that federal officials take into consideration this airport and other ports of entry in the U.S. territories when determining which, if any, additional U.S. ports of entry should be added to the screening list.

I also urge CDC and DHS to assess the potential risk that an individual with Ebola could arrive in the United States via a U.S. seaport, as distinct from a U.S. airport. I note that Puerto Rico receives reoccurring shipments of energy supplies transported on maritime vessels that originate in West Africa and are conceivably crewed by nationals of countries in the region where Ebola is present. It is important that federal officials think proactively about the various ways in which an individual with Ebola might come into contact with residents of the United States, including its territories, and take appropriate and thoughtful measures to reduce the risk of transmission to the greatest degree feasible.

I commend you and the agencies you lead for your work to address the public health concerns associated with Ebola, and I am confident that this situation can be resolved through a calm and comprehensive federal strategy. This nationwide strategy must include Puerto Rico and the other territories.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi
Member of Congress

cc: The Hon. Alejandro García Padilla, Governor of Puerto Rico
Dr. Ana C. Ríos Armendáriz, Secretary, Puerto Rico Department of Health
Jaime Plá, Executive President, Puerto Rico Hospital Association