

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 24, 2014

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

Dear Director Frieden:

In 2010, we wrote to you and other senior federal officials to call attention to the high rate of dengue fever in the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and to express concern about the level of resources that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was allocating to combat this mosquito-borne virus, which has sickened tens of thousands and killed dozens of American citizens in our two jurisdictions.

CDC funding to combat dengue in the United States, including its territories, is provided through the agency's Dengue Branch, headquartered in Puerto Rico. In our letter, we noted that the Dengue Branch had received only \$3.5 million in Fiscal Year 2008 and \$3.8 million in Fiscal Year 2009. We described such funding as "insufficient by any reasonable metric."

Since we sent our letter, we have been pleased that CDC funding to address dengue fever has increased each year, to \$4.2 million in Fiscal Year 2010, \$4.9 million in Fiscal Year 2011, \$5.1 million in Fiscal Year 2012, and \$5.5 million in Fiscal Year 2013. We want to thank you for the leadership you have demonstrated by boosting annual dengue funding by nearly 60 percent in this five-year period, and we urge the CDC to continue making dengue a priority.

We write now to call attention to the impact that chikungunya, another mosquito-borne virus, is having in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and to request a briefing from the CDC on its strategy to prevent and treat chikungunya in our jurisdictions. We hope and expect that this strategy will be properly resourced.

As you know, chikungunya is transmitted primarily by *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes, which are aggressive daytime-biting mosquitoes that can also transmit dengue. According to the latest CDC figures, which are current as of September 16th, there have been 278 confirmed locally-transmitted cases of chikungunya in Puerto Rico and 25 in the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as 18 confirmed travel-associated cases in Puerto Rico and four in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Puerto Rico Department of Health has far higher estimates, placing the number of confirmed cases at approximately 1,000 and the number of suspected cases at close to 4,000. Both the Puerto Rico Department of Health and the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health have declared an epidemic of chikungunya. With respect to the 50 states, CDC reports that there have been nine locally-transmitted cases of chikungunya in Florida and a total of over 1,000 travel-associated cases in over 40 states and the District of Columbia.

In June, the CDC announced that it would be sending an official to Puerto Rico to assist the Puerto Rico Department of Health with its investigation of chikungunya. We would like to receive a briefing on this step and all other steps that the CDC is taking to combat chikungunya in our two territories. We ask that this briefing include information on the exact amount of funding that CDC will allocate as part of this effort, the uses to which this funding will be put, and whether this funding will be provided through the Dengue Branch or another mechanism.

We also ask that the CDC be prepared to discuss the safety of blood products collected in Puerto Rico. Chikungunya and dengue can be transmitted by blood transfusion, and potential donors in Puerto Rico are screened using processes that do not detect either virus. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is considering a proposal, submitted on September 3rd, to rapidly implement a pathogen inactivation technology for blood products that could address this problem. We would like to discuss whether the CDC has been in contact with the FDA about this promising proposal.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to receiving the requested briefing.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi
Member of Congress



Donna M. Christensen
Member of Congress

cc: Dr. Lyle Petersen, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Vector-Borne Diseases