



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
For science. For action. For health.

September 26, 2018

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
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 Chairmen Blunt and Cole and Ranking Members Murray and DeLauro:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I write to urge you to oppose the administration's proposal to reduce the size of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service from 6500 officers to 4000 officers. This proposal, contained in the administration's "Delivering Government Solutions in the 21st Century: Reform Plan and Reorganization Recommendations" report, would result in a 38 percent reduction in the Commissioned Corps at a time when demand for these officers is increasing.

Agencies and departments throughout the federal government depend upon USPHS officers to accomplish their missions and protect the public's health. These agencies include: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Coast Guard, the Food and Drug Administration and the Indian Health Service. In addition, a USPHS admiral serves as Surgeon General for the Coast Guard, and USPHS officers provide health care for both the Coast Guard and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. A 38 percent reduction in USPHS officer strength would greatly harm the efforts of all of these federal organizations.

USPHS officers have deployed hundreds of times in the past ten years during public health emergencies and other disasters ranging from responding to hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, to assisting students and their parents in dealing with the aftermath of the tragic school shooting in Newtown, to supporting medical efforts for children exposed to lead in the drinking water in Flint, Michigan, to supporting efforts to contain and monitor the deadly Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa. Almost 900 USPHS officers have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan with U.S.

military forces, caring for the injured and supporting efforts to build and strengthen local health systems. Reducing the size of the Commissioned Corps by nearly 40 percent would significantly undermine the ability of the USPHS to respond quickly and strongly when the next disaster or public health emergency occurs.

While we strongly oppose the proposal to reduce the size and strength of the Commissioned Corps, we do support the idea of creating a reserve corps, with adequate funding, for the USPHS that could provide additional capacity and be deployed during a public health emergency or to fill vacant positions during Corps deployments. We would welcome additional details from the administration about this portion of its proposal, including a proposal for adequate funding to ensure its success and effectiveness.

Thank you for your attention to our serious concerns about this proposal. We strongly urge you to oppose this proposal that would significantly reduce the strength and numbers of the Commissioned Corps of the USPHS and instead urge you to focus on efforts to strengthen this crucial component of our nation's public health system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" being the most prominent.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director

Cc: The Honorable Lamar Alexander
The Honorable Greg Walden
The Honorable Frank Pallone