

*[Letter sent to relevant members of congress regarding appropriations]*

March 7, 2016

I am writing to you as CEO of one of the nation's largest community health centers that provides primary adult care, OB/GYN, pediatrics, behavioral health and much more to a largely uninsured population in Houston. My doctors and I are concerned about the likely spread of Zika virus across the Texas Gulf Coast and its impact on our pregnant patients and their babies. As you know, the evidence is getting stronger by the day that Zika causes microcephaly, or severe birth defects.

We were gratified that the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee held a hearing last week to hear from the nation's top health authorities on the virus. We share their collective urgency for Congress to help mitigate what could be a public health crisis for pregnant women from Texas to Florida.

Dr. John Hellerstedt, commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services has also highlighted time sensitive nature of the looming public health challenge. "Mosquito season is approaching, and the number of travel-related cases continues to inch up for Texas," he said. "It's only a matter of time before Zika virus is locally transmitted here by mosquitoes."

There is still time, however, to limit the significant spread of the virus in Texas and other southern states, but to do so will require the financial assistance now from the federal government and a commitment to work in tandem with local and state officials. Whether it's the Administration's \$1.8 billion emergency request or some other funding proposal, we simply urge swift consensus. Partisan wrangling over public health should not slow the all-hands-on-deck response we need to find a vaccine, increase mosquito controls, and help patients with care.

Legacy Community Health is in a unique position geographically and because of our patient population, many of whom travel to the Zika-affected regions of Central and South America to see family. We have issued warnings to pregnant moms personally and through news and social media not to travel to these areas. We are also now screening pregnant patients for Zika based on travel history and if they're symptomatic. Like any health care provider, our number one priority is the health and well-being of the people we serve.

Although it's an election year, we hope that to be the priority of yours, too.

Sincerely,

Katy Caldwell  
CEO, Legacy Community Health