Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 12, 2012

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington D.C. 20201

Dr. Tom Frieden
Director
Center for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Secretary Sebelius and Dr. Frieden:

We write to urge immediate action in addressing the West Nile Virus outbreak in Texas and across the nation.

As a recent article in the New England Journal of Medicine[1] states, West Nile Virus has entered a phase of unpredictability and remains difficult to control. First introduced in this county in 1999, the incidence of this disease in 2012 suggests an alarming trend.

As you know, Texas is the epicenter of a national West Nile Virus outbreak. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of all cases nationwide this summer were reported in Texas – nearly 10 times the total number of cases in the next most affected state. Tragically, the cases include 50 fatalities in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex region.

The situation in Texas is actually much worse than these preliminary figures indicate. These cases only reflect "reported cases" to health departments and there are only 61 full service local health departments within Texas' 254 counties, significantly contributing to under reporting. In addition, West Nile Virus has been identified in donated blood from 97 asymptomatic patients in Texas this season. Perhaps more ominous, West Nile Virus has recently been documented to cause chronic renal disease, which may lead to kidney failure and hypertension in up to 40% of victims.[2] West Nile Virus infections are expected to be an ongoing problem for the people in Texas.

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[1] Petersen, Lyle R. and Fischer, Marc. "Unpredictable and Difficult to Control – The Adolescence of West Nile Virus". *New England Journal of Medicine.* Web. 26 September 2012.

[2] Nolan MS, Podoll AS, Hause AM, Akers KM, Finkel KW, et al. (2012) Prevalence of Chronic Kidney Disease and Progression of Disease Over Time among Patients Enrolled in the Houston West Nile Virus Cohort. PLoS ONE 7(7): e40374. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0040374

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We believe the recent history of this disease creates a significant public health risk of national proportions and urge your immediate attention to this issue. Specifically we ask you to request the Public Health and Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise (PHEMCE) to make the development of a Food and Drug Administration approved vaccine and other medical countermeasures a public health priority.

With PHEMCE prioritization, we believe the Health and Human Services (HHS) Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) could immediately allocate existing resources to the development of a West Nile vaccine and countermeasures. Indeed, this emerging public health threat is exactly what the recently awarded federal/private centers for the development and manufacturing of medical countermeasures were intended to address.

We ask for your consideration of our request and your immediate attention to this public health threat.

Sincerely,

Kay Bailey Hutchison

John Conyers

Joe Barton

Bill Flores

Kevin Brady

Pete Olson

John R. Carter

Sam Johnson

Ralph M. Hall

K. Michael Conaway

Lamar Smith

Gene Green

John Culberson

Ruben Hinojosa

Pete Sessions

Blake Farenthold

cc: Dr. Nicole Lurie, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
Dr. Robin Robinson, Director, Office of Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority