July 1, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, Chair Murray, and Ranking Member Blunt:

On behalf of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), I am writing in support of President Biden’s request, as part of his FY22 budget, to create a new $400 million program that will invest in our nation’s core public health infrastructure and capacity by supporting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as it works directly with state, territorial, and local health departments. We strongly urge Congress to adopt this recommendation in its FY22 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill. We are also grateful for your work in acknowledging and prioritizing the need to support core public health capacity, modernize public health data collection, and strengthen the public health workforce throughout the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ASTHO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership association serving the chiefs of state and territorial health agencies and the more than 100,000 public health staff that work in those agencies. Our mission, from which our organizational strategy flows, is to support, equip, and advocate for state and territorial health officials in their work of advancing the public’s health and well-being. ASTHO tracks, evaluates, and advises members on the impact and formation of policy—public or private—pertaining to health that may affect state or territorial health agencies’ administration and provides guidance and technical assistance to its members on improving the nation’s health.

The FY22 budget put forth by President Biden acknowledges the urgent need to build public health agency capacity and puts forth a plan to address it in annual discretionary appropriations. Providing these resources to CDC will help address critical gaps that existed before the pandemic and provide the necessary resources to ensure sustained, continuous, and flexible funding resources for state and territorial health departments.
Key recommendations to support our public health infrastructure, as identified by state and territorial public health officials include:

- **Sustained Funding:**
  Short-term federal funding via emergency supplemental bills has been critically needed and is greatly appreciated, but these supplementals alone will not build back the lasting capacity needed to protect and promote the public’s health from ever-expanding threats. Congress must explore alternative funding models to ensure predictable and sustained funding over the next decade. President Biden’s budget proposal is the first step in that direction.

- **Allow Maximum Flexibility:**
  Individual states and territories have needs that are unique to their respective communities. Providing funding that is both flexible, while also recognizing the existing expertise of public health officials to make decisions that are best suited for jurisdictions, is critical to achieving long-term success.

- **Ongoing Support for Administrative Preparedness:**
  A strong public health response requires state, territorial, local, and tribal health departments to be nimble and aggressive to quickly mobilize resources. To provide necessary surge capacity, health departments must conduct accelerated administrative processes to ensure a timely response. Administrative preparedness encompasses a broad range of processes that may include emergency fund management, service contracting, critical supply and equipment purchasing, fiscal reporting, staffing, and volunteer management. Having the capacity to put emergency administrative preparedness plans in place requires ongoing funding to develop, exercise, and continuously improve these plans. Funding sources should allow for these sorts of cross-cutting activities.

ASTHO supports the extended availability of the proposed $400 million investment through September 30, 2023 to allow for necessary planning to transition from the COVID-19 response to addressing fundamental and ongoing public health challenges, including preparing for the next pandemic. The President’s budget proposal would provide needed resources to:

- Build capacity to assess risks as they arise in patients and communities and gather the right information at the right time;
- Strengthen workforce capability by hiring additional highly skilled epidemiologists, intervention specialists, biostatisticians, and other specialists to meet national quality standards; and
- Improve protocols and processes for disease detection and containment.

The public health workforce is a critically important asset. ASTHO is appreciative of the investment from Congress that resulted in the Administration’s recent announcement to invest $7.4 billion from the American Rescue Plan to modernize and improve our workforce by supporting the core of any public health agency: its people. As this shorter-term investment in response to the COVID-19 workforce winds down, we strongly support the proposed new investment at CDC, through annual appropriations, to bridge to sustained levels of ongoing support. We look forward to working with the Administration to leverage this investment and prepare for future and emerging public health threats.
We thank you for your steadfast leadership and continued support of governmental public health. ASTHO encourages the inclusion of this important public health priority in FY22 discretionary appropriations to further bolster our health and economic security. Should you have any questions or require any additional information, please contact Jeffrey Ekoma, ASTHO’s director of government affairs, at jekoma@astho.org.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Fraser, PhD, MS, CAE, FCPP
Chief Executive Officer, ASTHO