



Advancing Transfusion and
Cellular Therapies Worldwide

June 15, 2016

Dear Members of Conference Committee on Zika Funding:

AABB urges Congress to act immediately to enact legislation providing emergency supplemental funding to prepare for and respond to threats posed by the Zika virus. AABB (formerly known as the American Association of Blood Banks) is not-for-profit association representing individuals and institutions involved in the fields of transfusion medicine and cellular therapies. The association is committed to improving health through the development and delivery of standards, accreditation and educational programs that focus on optimizing patient and donor care and safety. AABB membership includes physicians, nurses, scientists, researchers, administrators, medical technologists and other health care providers. AABB accredits institutions in over 50 countries, including virtually every US blood center.

As you know, the Zika virus has the potential to continue its rapid spread, becoming a US, as well as global, public-health emergency that poses a grave risk to patients. At particular risk are pregnant women and their fetuses, who may be born with microcephaly, a severe birth defect. There also is very likely a link between Zika and Guillan-Barre syndrome, a sickness of the nervous system that can lead to paralysis.

In addition, Zika poses a threat to the safety and availability of the blood supply. In order to combat this threat, AABB and blood centers, in conjunction with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), have been working diligently for months to implement donor screening measures to prevent infected individuals from donating blood and move forward in offering a new screening test to identify and prevent the transfusion of infected units of blood. In Puerto Rico, for example unprecedented steps were taken to cease blood collections until an investigational blood screening test became available, during which time US blood centers, with the critical assistance of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), stepped forward to ship blood to Puerto Rico to meet their patients' needs.

However, more needs to be done to adequately protect patients requiring blood. For example, it is essential that the United States have real-time reporting of areas of active vector-borne transmission to assist blood establishments in other locations to implement appropriate travel deferrals and assure the safety of blood imported from other parts of the nation. Such efforts require substantial federal funding to support the critical public health activities of the Department of Health and Human Services, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, FDA and the National Institutes of Health, in close coordination with state departments of health and the blood banking community.

Time is of the essence in preventing the spread of Zika, especially as the hotter mosquito season is here. New funding is needed to pursue virus readiness and rapid response, enhance laboratory, epidemiology and surveillance capacity, and develop vaccines to prevent disease transmission.

This funding should not be taken from other essential public health programs. Therefore, AABB strongly urges Congress to expeditiously provide the greatest possible amount of emergency funding necessary to protect the American public from this potentially devastating disease.

Sincerely,

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