

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 12, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray,

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we request level funding of \$100 million for the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to prioritize research needed to develop a universal influenza vaccine. We appreciate your investment in this important research initiative in Fiscal Year 2018, and look forward to working with you to enhance our response to the influenza virus.

The severity of this year's influenza season, which is coming to an end, was a potent reminder of the annual threat this virus poses to communities across the country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that up to 56,000 Americans will die in a severe flu season. At least 142 children have already died from an influenza-associated illness this season. In addition to the human toll, influenza costs the nation an estimated \$10.4 billion in direct medical expenses and more than \$87 billion in total economic impact per year.

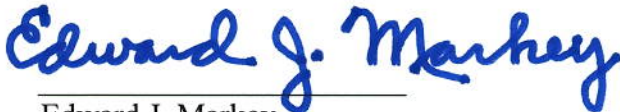
Despite the consistent, compounding burden influenza places on our families, health care infrastructure, and economy, we lack an effective response to mitigate its effects. This season's vaccine is 36 percent effective, and a typical vaccine ranges between 10 to 60 percent in effectiveness. Specifically, the current vaccine is only 25 percent effective against H₃N₂, the prominent viral strain in circulation earlier this season, which is associated with higher rates of hospitalizations and illness. We need a vaccine that offers robust protection against a number of flu strains, removing the need to create a suboptimal, stop-gap vaccine every year.

We are pleased that NIAID published its strategic plan to develop a universal influenza vaccine in *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*. This strategic plan provides a realistic framework by which NIAID can actualize its commitment to developing a universal influenza vaccine. By focusing on research initiatives to better understand the pathogenesis of influenza, the immune response to both influenza infection and vaccination, and different approaches to vaccination, we can propel our primary influenza prevention strategy by creating a more effective vaccine that provides longer, durable protection.

Influenza is a centuries-old scourge that needs a 21st century response, and investing in research to develop a universal influenza vaccine will help us achieve that important public health goal. Therefore, we encourage you to support improving our response to influenza by providing \$100 million in Fiscal Year 2019 for universal influenza vaccine research.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.


Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



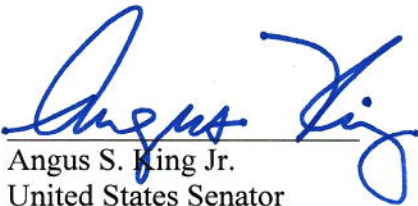
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



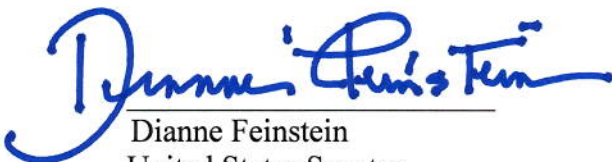
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Angus S. King Jr.
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator