

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 12, 2015

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you address current and future zoonotic diseases—human diseases with animal origins—we write to urge you to pursue a multidisciplinary, multisectoral approach that encompasses both human health expertise, and animal and environmental health disciplines.

As you know, the Ebola virus disease outbreak that continues to devastate West Africa was caused by transmission of the virus from an animal into the human population. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), such zoonotic diseases account for approximately 75% of all recently emerging infectious diseases. The concept that the health of humans is connected to the health of animals and the environment, is often referred to as the One Health approach which often includes physicians, veterinarians as well as ecologists to monitor and control public health threats. Although One Health is widely recognized to be integral to efforts to combat zoonotic disease, the collaborative effort of multiple disciplines required to address such disease outbreaks that occur at the human-animal interface has yet to materialize in a substantive way.

For example, in a retrospective analysis of the Ebola outbreak, the World Health Organization (WHO) wrote “Who could ever have guessed that such a notorious disease, previously confined to Central Africa and Gabon, would crop up in another distant part of the continent?” This statement was made despite the fact that in the July 2012 issue of the CDC’s Emerging Infectious Disease journal, wildlife scientists and veterinarians sounded the alarm of a potential Ebola virus threat to public health in the region after discovering evidence of the virus in bats of the Upper Guinean forest ecosystem.

A culture change is needed within our domestic and international public health agencies to heed these warnings and prevent diseases from entering human populations. When the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) determined that an increased collaboration between human and animal health officials was needed to combat antibiotic-resistant bacteria, you acted swiftly to ensure interagency cooperation. Similarly, we urge you to develop a National One Health Framework that will outline the steps required to instill a culture of collaboration between human, animal, and environmental health agencies. We also encourage you to press the United Nations (UN) to develop an Inter-Agency One Health Framework to address the WHO’s animal and environmental health information gaps, which the ongoing Ebola virus disease outbreak has brought to light.

With the necessary support, a National One Health Framework and a UN Inter-Agency One Health Framework could mitigate future outbreaks by providing the multidisciplinary, multisectoral approach required to minimize the risk of spillover of diseases from animals into human populations. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Al Franken
United States Senator



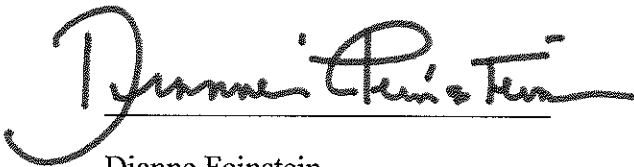
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