

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairwoman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwomen Murkowski and McCollum and Ranking Members Udall and Joyce:

We write to thank you for providing fiscal year (FY) 2020 funding to begin upgrades at the US Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) located in Madison, Wisconsin. Our organizations have been made aware of the deteriorating physical conditions at NWHC, which is the nation's only federal BSL-3 facility exclusively dedicated to scientific investigation and research on wildlife diseases that threaten human, animal, and environmental health. We hope to work with the Subcommittee to secure the funding needed to implement the full modernization of this critical Center.

As you know, the NWHC is a unique science center within the US Geological Survey – it is the only national center dedicated to wildlife disease detection, control, and prevention throughout the United States. Through a comprehensive program involving biomedical and ecological expertise and capabilities, the NWHC is a world leader in developing science-based solutions to some of the most deadly wildlife diseases including avian influenza, white nose syndrome of bats, and other emerging diseases that have devastated wildlife populations around the world and pose significant public health and economic risks. In addition, the NWHC provides critical early detection of biological threats and conducts national level biosurveillance for high-consequence pathogens in wildlife. Recent discoveries include identifying and characterizing the causative agent of white nose syndrome in bats, a disease that has devastated hibernating, insectivorous bats in North America. The NWHC was the first to detect the Asian strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza in waterfowl in the United States, providing important early warning for the commercial poultry industry. The NWHC also provides vital technical services to state and federal wildlife management agencies through assistance with wildlife disease investigations, timely dissemination of relevant information, and provision of tools and techniques to manage these diseases.

The NWHC consists of approximately 65,000 square feet of offices, common areas, and Biosafety Level Three (BSL-3) laboratories and animal holding facilities that are uniquely designed for wildlife species. **The current facilities are 40-50 years old, and have been well maintained, but are now in need of life-cycle replacement. Importantly, without adequate funding for upgrades, the Center may not be able to meet future standards for the operation of high biocontainment facilities.**

The NWHC has studied various approaches to modernization, including the business case analyses to explore the most feasible, cost-effective, and least disruptive option for modernization. These options

included comparing renovation versus new construction, owned versus leased facilities, and options for relocation. **Based on these analyses, NWHC determined that new construction on the current site is the most cost-effective option that minimizes disruption to continuity of operations.**

The analyses indicate approximately \$101 million is needed for new construction on the current site, but importantly, this estimate is for a one-time cost. The total funding needs may change based on a phased approach to new construction, which is important to ensure that world class science continues and that the safety of employees and the public is maintained, while also incorporating the latest in BSL-3 laboratory standards and best practices. **Our organizations therefore urge you to provide no-year funding in the FY 2021 spending bill to allow NWHC to continue its modernization efforts.**

We understand that the Subcommittee is operating in a limited discretionary budget environment. However, we feel strongly that NWHC has judiciously studied various approaches to identify the most economical path. Ultimately, investments made by the Subcommittee today yield incredible savings compared to the cost of a high consequence disease outbreak. The last avian influenza outbreak in Midwest poultry farms resulted in approximately \$3 billion of economic losses.

The NWHC is a truly unique facility and its loss would jeopardize this nation's ability to conserve biological resources and mitigate against biological threats. Thank you for your consideration of this critical situation as the Subcommittee considers 2021 funding. Our organizations look forward to working with you and your staff on this important issue.

Please do not hesitate to contact Alex Sands with the American Veterinary Medical Association at asands@avma.org should you have any questions. Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Veterinary Medical Association
American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians
American Association of Avian Pathologists
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Association of Zoo Veterinarians
American Dairy Science Association
American Feed Industry Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
EcoHealth Alliance
FASS
Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals - Multistate Initiative
National Association Federal Veterinarians
National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science
National Grain and Feed Association
National Pork Producers Council
National Turkey Federation
North American Renderers Association
The Wildlife Society
United States Animal Health Association
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee