April 17, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to thank you for your leadership and swift action to address the nation's wide-ranging needs to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, including the impact on individuals, small businesses, and federal agencies on the front lines of the response. As Congress considers the additional needs of the nations' public health infrastructure in light of COVID-19, our organizations urge you to also include the nation's animal health infrastructure in these efforts and provide $30 million for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN).

Now more than ever, a One Health approach is needed to ensure the nation is prepared for and capable of acting quickly to diagnose and respond to diseases. "One Health" recognizes that the health of people is deeply connected to the health of animals and the environment. As we've seen with COVID-19, most infectious diseases in humans are spread from animals. At least 75 percent of emerging or re-emerging human infectious diseases are estimated to be either zoonotic or vector-borne.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s animal health infrastructure is a critical component of the nation's public health infrastructure because of its role in safeguarding the U.S. food and feed supply against emerging and ongoing zoonotic disease outbreaks.

USDA supports the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), the nation's premier network of veterinary diagnostic laboratories on the front lines of these efforts. NAHLN laboratories provide for early and continuous detection of animal diseases that could destroy our food supply, devastate our agricultural industries, or spill into the human population.

The NAHLN is a well-established network of 59 state and university laboratories across the country that comprises highly trained veterinary pathologists and scientists who are experts in disease detection and response to outbreaks, such as coronavirus, using the latest molecular and serologic diagnostic technologies in high throughput platforms for same day results. For example, the NAHLN laboratories provided for rapid detection and a timely response to the 2015 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak, which cost the U.S. more than $1 billion in

economic losses. HPAI and continued mutations remain one the biggest threats to animal industries with zoonotic implications. NAHLN conducts several million serology and PCR tests just for avian influenza each year, besides conducting other important disease testing covering all species, protecting animal agriculture, the food supply and human health as well.

The NAHLN is a ready-to-go network that can utilize experts and laboratory resources already in place for protecting U.S. animal health to do the same for U.S. human health. In several states, NAHLN laboratories have stepped up to support public health colleagues in testing for COVID-19, including: the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, Iowa State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and the Colorado State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. In Oklahoma, the Oklahoma State University Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory has become the primary laboratory for human testing.

Despite this important work, federal funding for the NAHLN falls far short of the authorized level of $30 million needed for the network to operate at its highest capacity. While our organizations continue to advocate for this funding through the regular appropriations process, in light of COVID-19 and the constant threat of emerging zoonotic threats, we urge Congress to include this funding in supplemental funding measures to support a national, comprehensive health infrastructure.

Moreover, $30 million in funding for the NAHLN during these challenging times will allow us to leverage the network and its veterinary diagnostic capabilities to support the COVID-19 pandemic response while also ensuring the network can continue its core mission to protect the food supply.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD)

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)

Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC)

Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL)

National Association of Federal Veterinarians (NAFV)

One Health Commission