

Alliance for Biosecurity

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September 19, 2008

The Honorable Jane Harman
2400 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James Walsh
133 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Harman and Rogers,

We are writing on behalf of the Alliance for Biosecurity to express our strong support for H.R. 6671, the "Select Agent Program and Biosafety Improvement Act of 2008." We would also like to thank you for introducing this critical piece of legislation, which reauthorizes the Select Agent Program while making several significant improvements to it. As you may know, the Alliance for Biosecurity is a collaboration between the Center for Biosecurity of University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, pharmaceutical companies, and biotechnology companies working to develop vaccines and medicines for our nation's Strategic National Stockpile. The Alliance mission is to work in the public interest to promote a robust and sustainable research and development infrastructure necessary to prevent and treat the infectious disease threats that present security challenges in the 21st Century.

Advanced biodefense research is central to enhancing our preparedness for a bioweapon attack. Research into the deadly agents that could be used in a biological attack requires a great degree of precision and care, and the laboratories that perform this research must be held to the very highest standards of safety and security. H.R. 6671 refines and strengthens the regulations designed to maintain safety and security at high containment laboratories, and by doing so ensures that vital biodefense research can continue without posing undue risk to researchers, or to the communities that host these important national security facilities.

Recent assertions by the FBI that a domestic scientist was implicated in the 2001 anthrax attacks underscore the importance of enhancing security at high containment laboratories. In order to successfully achieve this goal, current procedures must be reviewed to identify strengths and weaknesses. A thorough evaluation of both the Select Agent Program and the oversight of biocontainment laboratories, as called for in H.R. 6671, will provide invaluable insight into how both of these programs can be improved.

Developing medical countermeasures for the full range of potential biological threats requires a larger contingent of researchers trained to work in high-containment environments. Unfortunately, traditional methods of providing instruction in biosafety training are unlikely to be sufficient to meet this demand in a timely manner. To address this issue and improve our ability to expand training of biodefense researchers, H.R. 6671 includes provisions that would leverage

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NanoViricides, Inc. • Pfizer Inc. • PharmAthene • Siga Technologies**

our nation's existing training capacity, thereby facilitating the training of new researchers who are prepared to work with hazardous agents and materials in the lab.

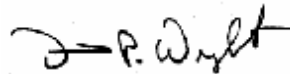
Finally, H.R. 6671 recognizes that disincentives to reporting accidents at high-containment laboratories have limited the ability of laboratory managers and regulators to engage in a "lessons learned" process that improves laboratory security and safety over time. To address this issue, the bill would require HHS and USDA to establish a voluntary reporting system designed to overcome these obstacles.

Advanced biodefense research and robust laboratory safety are not mutually exclusive. By striking a sound policy balance, it is possible to both perform the necessary and urgent research needed to mitigate a national security threat, and also to ensure that this research does not result in danger to the American people. H.R. 6671 lays out an appropriate and prudent approach to regulating biodefense research, and for this we commend and thank you.


Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Alliance,



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Senior Director of Operations and Communications
Pfizer Inc.
Co-Chair, Alliance for Biosecurity



David P. Wright
President & CEO
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Co-Chair, Alliance for Biosecurity



Tara O'Toole, MD
CEO & Director, Center for Biosecurity
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Strategic Director, Alliance for Biosecurity

cc:

Chairman Collin Peterson, Committee on Agriculture
Ranking Member Bob Goodlatte, Committee on Agriculture

Chairman John Dingell, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Ranking Member Joe Barton, Committee on Energy and Commerce

Chairman John Conyers, Committee on the Judiciary
Ranking Member Lamar Smith, Committee on the Judiciary