

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 14, 2024

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito,

We write in support of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (PHS) and urge increased funding to sustain its vital operations. As Senators committed to the well-being of our constituents and the nation, we recognize the indispensable role played by the Commissioned Corps in safeguarding public health and promoting the welfare of all Americans.

The PHS, as one of the eight uniformed services and the only service with an exclusive focus on public health, is at the forefront of protecting our nation's health. Its dedicated personnel, serving in 800 locations across the country and overseas, are the unsung heroes tirelessly working to ensure that Americans receive necessary medical and public health support in their daily lives and during times of crises particularly in underserved and vulnerable populations. These include deployments to provide public health support for families displaced by major hurricanes and to provide behavioral health care to resettle Afghan refugees.

The significant funding shortfall for the United States Public Health Service poses a significant threat to the readiness and response capabilities of the Corps, and we are disappointed that the President's Budget does not include a request specifically for PHS, as it has in previous years. The Ready Reserve program and Public Health Emergency Response Strike Teams (PHERST) are indispensable components of the Commissioned Corps, enabling rapid and effective responses to public health emergencies. Without adequate funding, these critical programs face elimination, and our nation's ability to respond to future health crises will be severely hampered - under current funding the Corps does not expect it'll be able to fulfill all anticipated requests between last December and the end of fiscal year 2024. Additionally, currently HHS does not have funding allocated to the Ready Reserve Program or for training.

We call for at least \$32 million in fiscal year 2025 to support the USPHS Commissioned Corps, securing its continued capacity to protect the health and safety of all Americans. This amount would provide critical support for the Ready Reserve, PHERST, and training. Such funding will reinforce the Commissioned Corps' ability to respond to health emergencies effectively. Swiftly replenishing the readiness and response capabilities of the Commissioned Corps is essential to ensuring the well-being of our citizens.

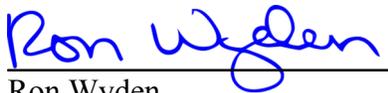
Additionally, we lend our support to the fiscal year 2025 President's Budget discretionary legislative proposals related to the USPHS Commissioned Corps. These proposals aim to align

the Commissioned Corps' authorities with those of other uniformed services, provide greater flexibility for efficient management, and enhance readiness and training. We urge you to seriously consider these proposals.

Moreover, we call for the provision of permanent annual appropriations for the USPHS Commissioned Corps. We wholeheartedly endorse the establishment of a \$150,000,000 budget line item for PHS. Administered through the Deputy Surgeon General, this funding will be dedicated to service operations and force management, ensuring the Commissioned Corps can efficiently respond to public health emergencies and protect our national health security. This funding would support the Ready Reserve, PHERST, and training efforts, as well as supporting improvements at headquarters, IT automation, deployment operations, and staff development.

In conclusion, we emphasize the critical role played by the USPHS Commissioned Corps in safeguarding public health, and we reiterate our strong support for increased funding to sustain its vital operations. By investing in the Commissioned Corps, we strengthen our nation's ability to respond effectively to public health emergencies and protect the health and well-being of our nation. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your support for the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator