

February 11, 2021

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senate
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baldwin:

The undersigned organizations, institutions, and companies representing a broad range of scientific, public health, and clinical professionals, write to express our support for S. 236, the Tracking COVID-19 Variants Act. Significantly boosting U.S. genetic surveillance and viral sequencing is key to responding to the evolving challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. As new SARS-CoV-2 variants emerge, we need this sequencing capacity to identify, track, and mitigate the impact of these new strains, including conducting epidemiologic investigations to determine the significance of new variants on human health.

We are especially pleased that the bill authorizes up to \$2 billion in emergency supplemental funding for the Advanced Molecular Detection (AMD) program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to bolster and accelerate its ongoing vital work to conduct national sequence-based viral surveillance and integrate genomics and genomic epidemiology. This work has been conducted in part through an innovative public-private partnership, the Sequencing for Public Health Emergency Response, Epidemiology, and Surveillance (SPHERES) Consortium, which includes dozens of members from all segments of the clinical and research laboratory community.

Currently, the U.S. lags far behind other countries in its ability to sequence viral samples. This funding will bring our nation up from a sequencing level of 0.3 percent ([43rd in the world](#)) to a level that allows for sequencing an adequate sample to estimate variant circulation nationally. With much-needed supplemental funding through CDC's AMD program into the combined resources of public health, academic, and clinical laboratories, as well as research institutions and private sector entities, the U.S. will rapidly expand sequencing to provide a complete picture of the circulating virus, its patterns of transmission, and how it is evolving as we begin immunizing the population.

Since 2014, the AMD program has employed next generation sequencing (NGS) to bring the concept of precision medicine to bear for "precision public health." AMD has given us new tools to detect disease faster, identify outbreaks sooner, and protect people from emerging and evolving disease threats. The importance of the AMD program and its work to our response to SARS-CoV-2 cannot be overstated, and without the resources authorized in this legislation, we will not be able to reach the level of surveillance needed to protect Americans from the ongoing threat of SARS-CoV-2.

We thank you for introducing this important legislation. We urge its swift enactment by Congress, and we look forward to working with you and your colleagues to meet the moment through more robust genetic surveillance by ensuring CDC's AMD program has the resources it needs to carry out this critical work.

Sincerely,

AdvaMedDx
American Association of Bioanalysts
American Clinical Laboratory Association
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Lung Association
American Medical Technologists
American Psychological Association
American Society for Clinical Pathology
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Virology
American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
Association for Molecular Pathology
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Pathology Chairs
Association of Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Biophysical Society
California Life Sciences Association
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Emory University
Exact Sciences Laboratories
GenMark Diagnostics
Ginkgo Bioworks
Helix
Illumina
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Institute of Environmental Science and Research Limited
Invitae
Laboratory Corporation of America Holdings
National Independent Laboratory Association
Psmagen
Shenandoah University
Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
Society for Public Health Education
Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists
The Gerontological Society of America
The Jackson Laboratory
Thermo Fisher Scientific
Trust for America's Health
University of California Health System
University of Minnesota
University of Wisconsin-Madison
University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health