GHTC
global health technologies coalition

advancing **innovation** to save lives

April 26, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

As members of the Global Health Technologies Coalition (GHTC)—a group of more than 30 nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, and aligned businesses advancing policies to accelerate the creation of new drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, and other tools that bring healthy lives within reach for all people—we write to highlight the critical role of US programs that support global health research and development (R&D) and thank you for your support of important R&D at the US Department of Defense (DoD) for tools to protect the warfighter which also have applicability in the broader global health context.

We write to emphasize the importance of the DoD's infectious disease research not only in promoting the safety of our servicemen and women abroad, but also in supporting US global health efforts to address HIV/AIDS, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases in low-income countries. This reality is aptly reflected in the motto of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, "Soldier Health, World Health." **For fiscal year 2020, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to sustain and protect funding for research to develop new global health technologies at the DoD both within the Defense Health Program and the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program, and where possible target new funds from proposed increases in Defense spending to important infectious disease research that benefits both our service members and vulnerable populations overseas.**

The DoD plays a unique role in the advancement of new vaccines, drugs, and health technologies that prevent and treat infectious diseases that many Americans never see up close, but our servicemen and women stationed overseas experience alongside local communities. We saw this most recently with the Department's response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. DoD's quick work to advance the development of Ebola vaccines and treatments during troop deployment to West Africa underscores the importance of DoD research for countermeasures to address the many disease threats that may undermine operational effectiveness. The effects of this commitment continues: the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research together with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases conducted

Phase 1 testing of the rVSV-ZEBOV Ebola vaccine candidate currently being deployed to help counter the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, underscoring the additional public health benefits of DoD's infectious disease research.

Not only are DoD's research efforts for infectious disease critical to protecting our troops overseas, but they are also important for promoting global health and global health security. Diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases devastate hundreds of millions of people around the world, pose public health threats in the United States, and inhibit the economic growth of our global trading partners. In our increasingly interconnected world, infectious diseases are a plane ride—or mission deployment—away, and research at DoD yields tremendous dividends for saving lives around the world, promoting global growth and development, and ensuring global health security.

In particular, malaria, which threatens the lives of nearly 3.2 billion people in tropical and poor regions of the world, is also a significant threat to the operational readiness of the US military: more person-days were lost among US military personnel due to malaria than to bullets during every military campaign fought in malaria-endemic regions during the 20th century. Thanks to on-going research at DoD, nearly all of the most effective and widely used antimalarials were developed in part by US military researchers.

The study of diseases, including malaria, dengue fever, leishmaniasis, and smallpox, has historically been an important component of the DoD's medical research programs worldwide. While focused on protecting and treating US armed forces, the global health efforts of DoD and its partners include substantial R&D, infrastructure and capacity building, as well as training programs that benefit countries with few resources for health care. **The DoD continues to conduct research aimed at developing solutions to global health challenges. For example:**

- The US Military Malaria Vaccine Program (USMMVP), made up of the Naval Medical Research Center Malaria Department and Walter Reed Army Institute of Research Malaria Vaccine Branch, is the world's largest translational research enterprise dedicated to developing a malaria vaccine. USMMVP has led the development of vaccine candidates offering high-level and partial protection against malaria, as well as the discovery of novel protective malaria antigens and new ways to test vaccines prior to going into humans. The Walter Reed Army Institute for Research led early clinical development of the RTS,S vaccine in the 1990s and is currently involved in clinical trials of alternative RTS,S regimens. The RTS,S malaria vaccine is the most advanced malaria the first and, to date, only vaccine to show a protective effect against malaria among young children in Phase 3 clinical trials. Pilot introduction of RTS,S is expected to begin in 2019 in selected areas of Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi.

- The US Military HIV Research Program (MHRP) continues its efforts to develop a safe and effective HIV vaccine. Researchers began screening participants for a new follow-up study, supported by the MHRP, on the RV144 HIV vaccine candidate regimen. MHRP also announced that it was selected as a Clinical Trials Unit and will receive funding from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases to continue work on HIV vaccine and therapeutics research. DoD programs in leishmaniasis and dengue fever research have led to breakthroughs in treatment for these diseases.

- The Army and Navy overseas medical research laboratories are part of the vital global health research network, and the staff of the infectious disease programs have years of hands-on experience with some of the most deadly global diseases.

- The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research first synthesized the antimalarial drug candidate Tafenoquine, which received Food and Drug Administration approval in 2018 as a single-dose treatment for the radical cure (prevention of relapse) of *P.vivax* malaria, the first new treatment developed for the strain in over 60 years.

- The Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP)'s Peer Reviewed Medical Research program has previously included tuberculosis (TB) and malaria as priority research areas. As TB drug resistance continues to grow, new tools are urgently needed to tackle TB and its potential impact on military personnel stationed in areas where TB is endemic, justifying its inclusion on the list of CDMRP eligible diseases. Similarly, the US military has an increasing presence in Africa and Asia, which are primary locations for malaria transmission. Because servicemembers deployed by the US military comprise a majority of the healthy adults traveling each year to malarial regions on behalf of the US government, DoD has taken a primary role in the development of antimalarial drugs and vaccines. Malaria has previously been included as a research topic in the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program in 2004 and from 2012-2018. In order to continue to protect our military from its longest-running and deadliest infectious disease foe, we respectfully request that Congress return malaria to the list of eligible diseases under the Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program.

- The Defense Advance Research Program Agency pioneered technology that has led to electrochemical generators of chlorine that may be able to fulfill a community's needs for effective disinfectants for water or surfaces by using just salt water and a simple battery source, such as a car or motorcycle battery—an intervention that could have profound health implications for populations in low-resource settings.

- The Defense Threat Reduction Agency is conducting groundbreaking work on vaccine and chemical reagent thermo-stabilization as well as point-of-care diagnostic tests for infectious diseases, with positive implications for both global health and US military health in low-resource settings.

The advancement of global health through new innovations is bolstered by the DoD's research and support of product development. Only by sustaining commitment to medical R&D will we protect servicemen and women from endemic and emerging global diseases and maintain recent gains in global health.

We urge you to work with DoD to prioritize research and product development for global health diseases within their budgets and programming plans, fund infectious disease R&D accounts as robustly as possible, and protect agency-wide funding for global health R&D. Specifically, it is critical to support infectious disease research at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and the Naval Medical Research Center, including their work on novel vaccines for threats like malaria, chemoprophylaxis, disease surveillance technologies, and other countermeasures for diseases of military and global health importance. We also urge you to consider increased support for DoD infectious disease research programs as part of the Administration's proposal to increase DoD funding in FY20. Finally, as the Army reviews its structure for the Defense Health Agency and various research functions, we urge you to provide oversight to ensure that these vital infectious disease research capabilities that directly attribute to warfighter protection are protected and sustained.

We understand the unique pressures you face in setting priorities for our nation and our military. Infectious disease research protects the lives of our soldiers and millions of people around the world, fosters goodwill that enhances our national security, and creates jobs and economic growth at home. These benefits are unquestionably among the nation's highest priorities.

We stand ready to work with you on these important issues that are essential to achieving our nation's global health and security goals. Please do not hesitate to contact GHTC Director Jamie Bay Nishi at jnishi@ghtcoalition.org or (202) 822-0033 if you have questions or need any additional information.

Sincerely,

American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene

AVAC

Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation

FIND

Global Health Council

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Infectious Diseases Society of America

PATH

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