

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2015

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
H405 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515-6018

The Honorable Peter J. Visclosky
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
1040A Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515-0005

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Visclosky:

As you begin crafting the fiscal year 2016 Defense Appropriations Act, we are writing to request that you provide \$5 million in the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) for research on tick-borne diseases (TBD's). While we understand the fiscal restraints governing your funding decisions for the coming year, we are hopeful you will recognize the direct and significant benefit to the military and its missions by funding this vital research.

Lyme and other tick-borne diseases are a significant threat to military forces and their dependents, not only at domestic U.S. bases and training facilities, but worldwide. Lyme disease is the most frequently reported tick-borne disease in the U.S. military but many others are widespread on multiple continents where U.S. forces may be deployed. Additionally, it is important to recognize that tick populations and the diseases they carry are not static, but are emerging and growing threats in many regions, such as the southeastern and Midwestern U.S. There are currently at least 16 known TBDs, with new ones discovered in the past few years—including Heartland and Bourbon—as well as viruses like Powassan becoming more prevalent and deadly.

Lyme disease alone can be found in at least 80 countries around the globe and is endemic in many countries and regions. Confirmed cases in the military services have been diagnosed at more than 120 locations worldwide. In the U.S., Lyme disease is the most common disease transmitted from animals to humans. In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) amended their estimates of U.S. cases to reflect the known but unreported cases and now project that the number of Americans diagnosed with Lyme disease each year is around 300,000 annually.

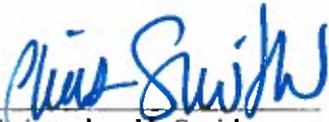
According to Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center (AFHSC), Lyme disease cases diagnosed at Air Force, Army, and Navy facilities increased sharply after 2006 and have remained at higher levels than in earlier years. In a 12-year surveillance period (2000-2011), Lyme disease accounted for 70 percent of all reported vector-borne or zoonotic diseases diagnosed at Air Force health facilities, and 39 percent of all such diseases at Navy and Army health facilities.

The AFHSC recognizes in its October 2012, Medical Surveillance Monthly Report that “vectorborne diseases continue to reduce operational capabilities.” The AF Aeromedical Waiver Guide (revised December 2007) states that if vector-borne diseases are left untreated, they “could impact the safety of the individual and the mission.”

We clearly do not have a good grasp on Lyme and the numerous other tick-borne diseases that complicate diagnosis and treatment for both the civilian and military populations. One tick bite can result in simultaneous co-infections with multiple disease-causing organisms. Accordingly, funding is needed in the CDMRP for research on TBD’s, including to develop more sensitive and accurate diagnostic tests for Lyme and to increase understanding of the full range of Lyme disease processes, as well as the numerous mechanisms that may allow organisms to persist post treatment.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request and we look forward to working with you to ensure we are safeguarding the operational capabilities of our Armed Forces and protecting the health of U.S. service members and their dependents.

Sincerely,



Christopher H. Smith
Co-Chair
Lyme Disease Caucus



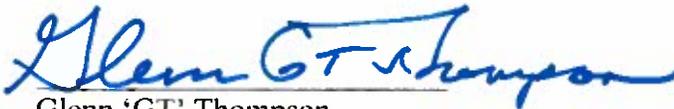
Collin Peterson
Co-Chair
Lyme Disease Caucus



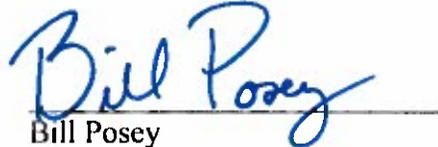
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Barbara Comstock
Member of Congress



Glenn 'GT' Thompson
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Bill Posey
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Chellie Pingree
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Sean Patrick Maloney
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