

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2023

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

We write to express our concern about the budgetary implications of the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) for the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps, the USPHS Ready Reserve, and the USPHS Public Health Emergency Response Strike Teams (PHERST). The USPHS Commissioned Corps has served as a vital asset to you and the nation over the years, and it is vitally important we continue to build capacity within the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. We urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure funds are identified to sustain and build these critical programs while we work to fund these programs into the future.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act rescinded certain American Rescue Plan Act funds, jeopardizing the USPHS Commissioned Corps public health emergency response capabilities. We fought hard for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which authorized the USPHS Commissioned Corps Ready Reserve and built capacity for PHERST. We also fought for the American Rescue Plan Act, which has been supplementing these important programs. The USPHS Commissioned Corps, Ready Reserve, and PHERST are critical to the nation's public health and our global health security. It is vital to ensure these programs are sustained so that HHS can continue to respond to the public health needs of the nation.

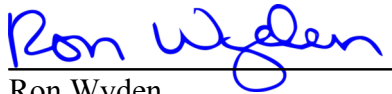
The USPHS Commissioned Corps is one of eight federal uniformed services, and it is the only service with an exclusive focus on public health. The COVID-19 pandemic and unprecedented natural disasters, including wildfires, hurricanes, and droughts, have brought to light the importance of investing in our preparedness and the nation's health through the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

The USPHS Commissioned Corps Ready Reserve and PHERST meet the current challenges of maintaining the nation's health security by augmenting the Commissioned Corps' capability to respond to health emergencies, improve access to health services, and ensure vulnerable and underserved populations receive the health care they need.

We hope you will continue to advocate for and support this critical public health workforce asset and your frontline public health responders. It is important that HHS develop a plan for sustaining the USPHS Commissioned Corps with remaining funds and future budget proposals. We look forward to reviewing your plan for funding these important programs.

Thank you for your attention to this time critical issue. We stand ready to work with you to help ensure that this vitally important uniformed service remains fully capable and at the ready to protect the public health of the nation.

Sincerely,



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator