Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

Executive Committee:

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Robert Harrison, MD, MPH
Chief, Occupational Health Surveillance and Evaluation Program
California

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Deputy Commissioner and State Epidemiologist
New Jersey

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State Epidemiologist and Director
Epidemiology and Response Division
New Mexico

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New York

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Mark Baptiste, PhD
Director, Division of Chronic Disease Prevention and Adult Health
New York State

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David Johnson, MD, MS
Executive Medical Director, Division of Environmental Health
Florida

Infectious Disease:
Christine Hahn, MD, MPH
State Epidemiologist
Idaho

Members-At-Large
Allen S. Craig, MD
State Epidemiologist and Director of Communicable and Environmental Disease Services
Tennessee

Jo Hofmann, MD
State Epidemiologist for Communicable Disease
Washington

Melvin Kohn, MD, MPH
State Epidemiologist
Oregon

Executive Director:
Patrick J. McConnon, MPH

March 20, 2007

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James Walsh
Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: $5 million in FY '08 for the CDC/CSTE Applied Epidemiology Fellowship Program and an increase of $2 million for the APHL Laboratory Science Fellowship Program

Dear Representatives Obey and Walsh:

The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) and the Association of Public Health Laboratories urge you to provide $5 million in the FY 2008 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill for the CDC/CSTE Applied Epidemiology Fellowship Program within the CDC Office of Workforce and Development and an increase of $2 million for the APHL/Laboratory Science Fellowship Program within the National Center for Infectious Diseases.

CSTE is a professional association of over 1,000 public health epidemiologists. As state and locally based epidemiologists, CSTE members are the frontline disease detectives for naturally occurring infectious diseases and for bioterrorism and emergency response. CSTE's members are also concerned about epidemiologic capacity and surveillance to address chronic disease, environmental health threats, MCH, occupational disease and injury. A key element in public health capacity is availability of trained professionals, particularly epidemiologists, who can function in the applied setting at the community level. Three CSTE-sponsored surveys of state epidemiology capacity (2001, 2004, 2006) demonstrate that there is a serious and worsening gap, currently 34%, in the number of trained epidemiologists needed and their availability. This gap is expected to worsen with looming retirements (summary of 2006 survey attached).

National Headquarters: 2872 Woodcock Boulevard ● Suite 303 ● Atlanta, Georgia 30341-4015
phone: 770.458.3811 ● fax: 770.458.8516
www.cste.org

In response to the Epidemiologic Capacity Surveys, CSTE developed a two-year applied epidemiology fellowship program targeting new MPH and PhD graduates with concentrations in epidemiology. The fellows work full-time in state or local health departments and are supervised in a mentoring arrangement during their work assignment. The program is funded by CDC, but with cobbled together funds, currently totaling $2 million and currently supporting 33 first and second year fellows. This fragile funding arrangement is in danger of disappearing. It needs a Congressional commitment of $5 million per year which would boost the number of first year fellows from 16 to 65. This number would close the serious and growing gap in epidemiology capacity at the state and local level where disease surveillance, early disease detection, and rapid response combine to protect the public's health.

The Emerging Infectious Diseases (EID) Laboratory Fellowship Programs train and prepare scientists for careers in public health laboratories and support public health initiatives related to infectious diseases and environmental health. One year fellowship programs for bachelor's or master's level scientists with an emphasis on the practical application of technologies, methodologies, and practices related to emerging infectious diseases. Two year laboratory research fellowships are geared to doctoral level (PhD, MD, or DVM) scientists with an emphasis on research or development in infectious diseases.

Half of the fellows are matched with mentors in state or local public health laboratories, while the other half work at CDC laboratories. Since 1996, 314 fellows have participated in this unique opportunity, contributing to significant publications, providing laboratory support in the trenches during outbreak investigations, presenting at key national scientific meetings and symposia. Current funding provided is $3 million which supports 27 fellows. By increasing funding to $5 million annually would increase class size to 50 fellows, thereby offering potential future public health leaders exposure to the state and federal public health laboratory system, build networking linkages, gain greater understanding about the complexities and collaborative nature of public health, understand how science and national policy intersect, as well as potentially close the gaps in workforce shortages at the leadership and other levels within the public health laboratory community.

Together, epidemiologists and laboratory scientists provide the backbone of the public health community.

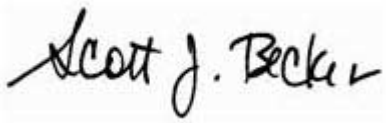
CSTE and APHL recommend the following language to be included in the report accompanying the FY 2008 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill:

Report Language Addressing Shortages in Applied Epidemiology and Laboratory Science in State and Local Health Departments

The Committee provides $5 million for the CDC/Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists Applied Epidemiology Fellowship Training program within the CDC Office of Workforce and Career Development and an increase of $2 million for the CDC/APHL Laboratory Science Fellowship Program within the National Center for Infectious Diseases to address the documented shortages of these core public health professionals in state and local health departments.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. McConnon, MPH
Executive Director
CSTE



Scott J. Becker, PhD
Executive Director
APHL

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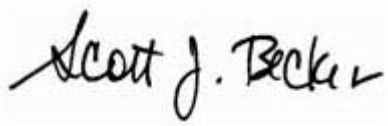
Patrick J. McConnon, MPH
Executive Director
CSTE



Scott J. Becker, PhD
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APHL