

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 9, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

We write to express our serious concern regarding the recent outbreak of the Zika virus in U.S. jurisdictions and abroad in the Americas, the Pacific and Africa. We urge additional steps be taken now in the United States to adequately address this serious crisis at home and to help lead a global response abroad.

As you know, Zika is an arbovirus, primarily transmitted to humans by mosquitoes and potentially transmitted through mother-to-fetus transmission, semen, or blood. For humans, the Zika virus has shown mild symptoms such as fever, rash, joint pain or conjunctivitis. However, the possible harm to pregnant women and fetuses is extremely high.

Many women infected with Zika have been found to give birth to infants with microcephaly, a rare neurological condition associated with abnormal smallness of the head and incomplete brain development. Among infected women in Brazil, for example, there have been 3,893 cases of microcephaly since October 2015. This is of particular concern as Rio de Janeiro prepares to host the 2016 summer Olympics.

Due to the Ebola outbreak in 2015, the international community has learned valuable lessons on how to best address global public health crises of this potential magnitude. Similar to Ebola and malaria, the Zika virus had been regarded as a neglected tropical disease due to original evidence that it only has mild flu-like symptoms. However, the National Institute of Health (NIH) recently released a model estimating that more than 200 million people live in areas that are conducive to the spread of Zika. The recent and rapid spread of the disease to 25 countries and 3 U.S. territories, the dozens of travel-associated cases reported so far in the U.S., and its increasing ties to microcephaly have intensified public health concerns. It's clear that a broader response is necessary to combat the spread of the virus, and the U.S. must lead the international effort.

First, we must continue to increase public education efforts on the symptoms, risks, and transmission of the Zika virus. We commend the CDC for ramping up public health outreach over recent days, notably developing and publicizing interim guidelines for health care providers and pregnant women traveling to countries where Zika is currently present. Yet, with the World Health Organization (WHO) issuing a warning that the Zika virus will likely continue spreading within the United States and most of the Americas, it is crucial for Americans to better understand ways to minimize the potential for Zika exposure.


Second, we must support more serious tracking of the Zika virus. According to the CDC, Zika outbreaks in this country will most likely be caused by infected travelers returning home with the virus. The CDC just recently labeled Zika a “nationally notifiable disease”, which will allow for increased education, surveillance, and pinpointing of areas vulnerable to outbreaks, but more must be done to track and report infections and protect against the spread of the virus in the U.S. Additionally, the CDC must work in tandem with health care providers to encourage travelers to South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean to be proactive should symptoms present themselves and report those symptoms to their local public health agencies.

Third, we must provide funding for Zika research and accelerate and incentivize efforts to develop a vaccine. Currently, there are no medicines or commercial tests available to treat and screen those with the Zika virus, and there are no vaccines to prevent it. Despite an emerging picture on the transmission and risks of Zika, many questions remain. The full range of symptoms and the virus’s links to neurological conditions are unclear, as well as whether it can be transmitted by methods other than mosquito. We know from the recent Ebola epidemic that the United States is uniquely positioned to make rapid advances in research and drug development that can help contain and eradicate dangerous infections. Therefore, we must immediately implement a broader strategy to understand the virus and develop treatments.

Finally, the lack of treatment and preventative options require a more robust effort to contain the Aedes mosquito species, which spreads the disease. We must explore which mosquito control and eradication programs are most effective as well as how and where to best deploy them. The elimination of mosquito breeding grounds is critical and fumigation, water treatment and area wide integrated pest management options must be considered. Programs like these have been vital in preventing the spread of mosquito borne illnesses in the past.

Alarmism is rarely a productive response to the challenges facing the world today, but responsible efforts by federal, state, territory and local governments can help address the current international situation with respect to Zika and minimize the serious risk that the virus poses to the communities we represent. We stand ready to support your efforts to combat the Zika virus. We request your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



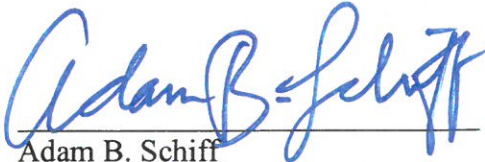
Chellie Pingree
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William R. Keating
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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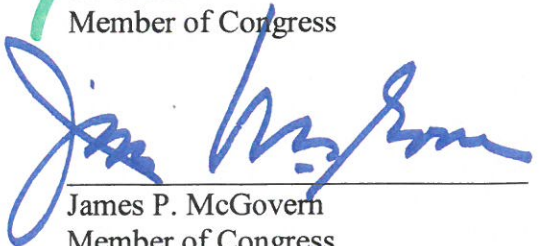
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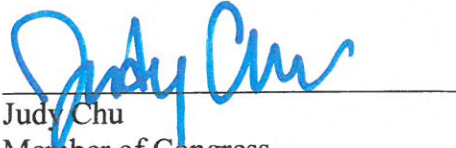
Al Green
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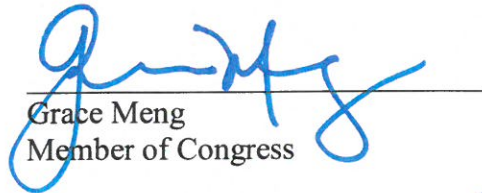
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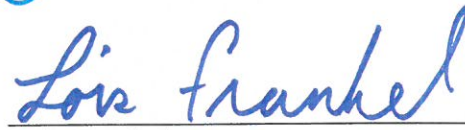
David Loeb sack
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



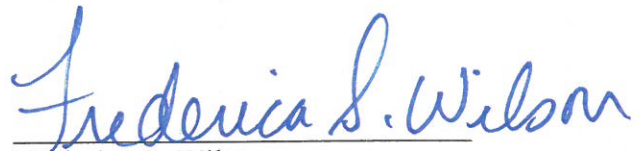
Grace Meng
Member of Congress



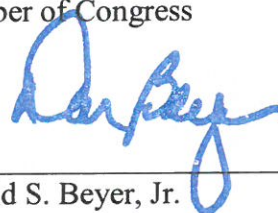
Lois Frankel
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Patrick Murphy
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Frederica S. Wilson
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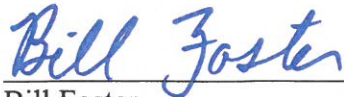
Donald S. Beyer, Jr.
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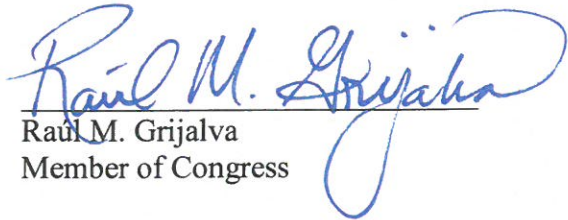
Michael E. Capuano
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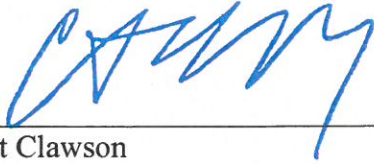
Jose E. Serrano
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Bill Foster
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Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



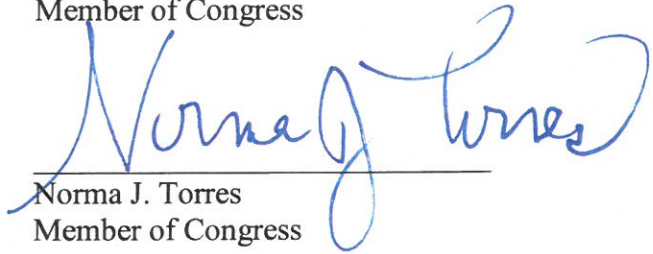
Curt Clawson
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Tulsi Gabbard
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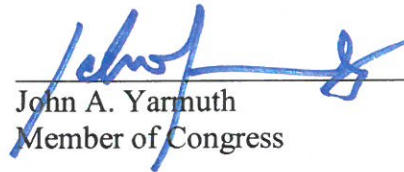
John K. Delaney
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Norma J. Torres
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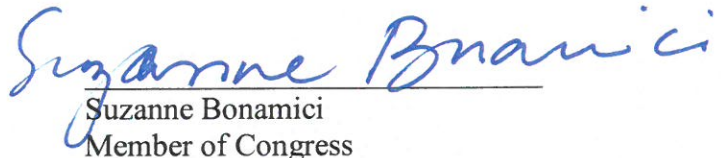
Raul Ruiz
Member of Congress



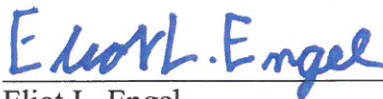
John A. Yarmuth
Member of Congress



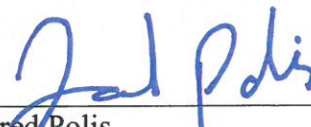
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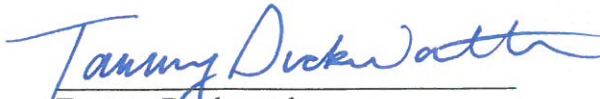
Suzanne Bonamici
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Eliot L. Engel
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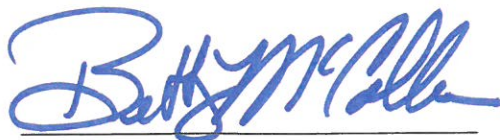
Tammy Duckworth
Member of Congress



Chris Stewart
Member of Congress



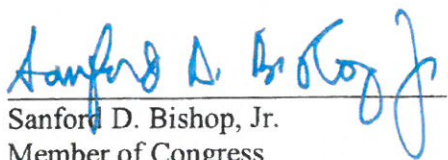
Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Member of Congress



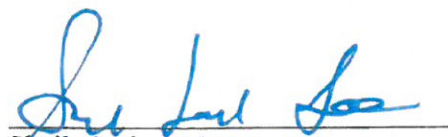
Betty McCollum
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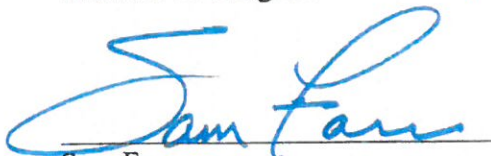
Debbie Dingell
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Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



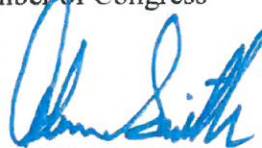
Sheila Jackson-Lee
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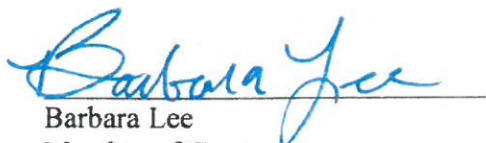
Sam Farr
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Brenda L. Lawrence
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Adam Smith
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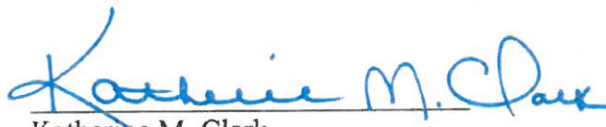
Barbara Lee
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Robin L. Kelly
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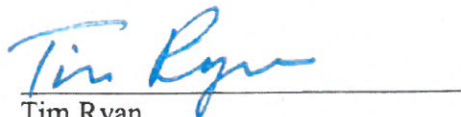
Katherine M. Clark
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Ted Deutch
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Ann M. Kuster
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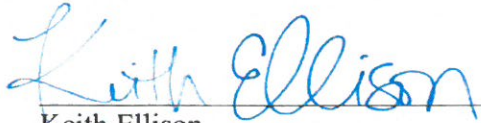
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Ed Perlmutter
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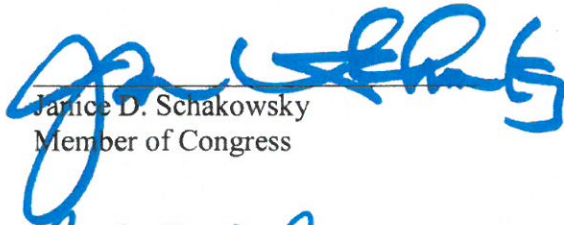
Steve Cohen
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Keith Ellison
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Ron Kind
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Janice D. Schakowsky
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Filemon Vela
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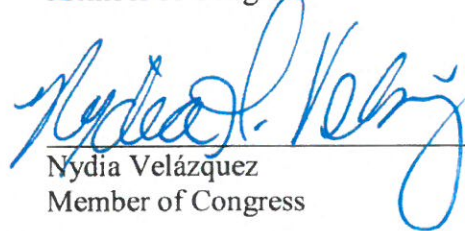
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Joaquin Castro
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Gregory W. Meeks
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Nydia Velázquez
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Susan A. Davis
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