

November 15, 2001

The Honorable Edward Kennedy
U.S. Senate
315 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Frist
U.S. Senate
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM), I want to congratulate you on the introduction of your legislation, the Bioterrorism Preparedness Act of 2001. ACP-ASIM is the nation's largest medical specialty society, representing 115,000 physicians and medical students who specialize in internal medicine.

For years, the College has been deeply concerned about the threat of a biological or chemical attack to the public health and how unprepared physicians, nurses, and the medical and public health organizations are. Disaster planning to respond to the serious threat of a biological or chemical weapon attack is critical. Neither the physician community nor the public health infrastructure is adequately equipped to meet this challenge. The level of federal commitment to respond to this kind of threat must be one that will last for many years to come. We applaud your efforts to address these gaps in our nation's public health infrastructure.

Your legislation makes an important down payment to respond to a biological attack by focusing nearly \$3.2 billion to strengthen our public health infrastructure and protect our nation's food supply.

We believe that effective state and local public health infrastructures are essential to respond to a biological or chemical attack. Therefore, there must be sufficient funding to establish seamless linkages of communication among medical personnel, and sufficient funding for the education and training of health care professionals. Additionally, there must also be adequate supplies of vaccines and antibiotics available throughout the country in the event of an attack. ACP-ASIM appreciates your efforts to strengthen our nation's public health infrastructure.

Your legislation also includes a significant level of funding to protect this nation's food and water supply. We believe that our nation's crops, livestock, and water supply remain susceptible to attack and must be protected. Adequate levels of funding should be appropriated to ensure a safer food and water supply through additional inspectors, enhanced surveillance systems, better prevention programs, faster outbreak response, enhanced education, and better coordinated and focused research and risk assessment activities. ACP-ASIM also appreciates your efforts to address these areas of concern.

While ACP-ASIM believes that a chemical threat is as likely as a biological attack – and Congress should adequately fund legislation that addresses both – we remain committed to

working with Congress to become an effective defensive force against an attack. Education and preparation are key components in promoting an efficient, expeditious defense to bioterrorism. The College remains committed to increasing the preparedness level of our members and other physicians to *detect, treat, and contain* the hostile deployment of biological or chemical agents.

We thank you and other members of the Senate for your leadership in keeping America safe from a bioterrorist attack, and thank you for seeking our input.

Sincerely,

William J. Hall, MD, FACP
President

CC: Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee