December 8, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairs Leahy and DeLauro and Ranking Members Shelby and Granger:

Thank you for your leadership and support for our nation's public health infrastructure and workforce during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular, your support for public health data modernization through both regular appropriations and emergency funding bills. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bills include essential increases to the public health programs in dire need of sustained annual funding—and an increase in funding for CDC's Data Modernization Initiative. We urge you and your colleagues to work quickly to pass the FY 2022 Labor, HHS Bill and ensure that public health is fully funded in the midst of a global pandemic. As our public health officials react to the emergence of the latest COVID-19 variant, Omicron, another continuing resolution of any duration would further damage our public health infrastructure and impede our ability to respond to COVID-19 and any other emergencies.

The Data Modernization Initiative (DMI) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a commitment to building the world-class data workforce and data systems that are ready for the next public health emergency. We are grateful to Congress for providing nearly $1 billion to date for CDC's DMI through annual and supplemental appropriations. Now, we need robust, sustained, annual funding to ensure we are investing in public health systems and infrastructure, including at state and local health departments, that will keep pace with evolving technology and stand ready to combat any emerging threat to public health.

The DMI is helping to create a standards-based, interoperable public health infrastructure—ensuring all systems can communicate and share data seamlessly with one another; advancing standards so that information can be stored and shared across systems; and facilitating complete and timely reporting so that our public health system has essential data on race, ethnicity, pregnancy status, treatments, and co-morbidities that are critical for achieving equity in public health response.

As we continue to battle the rapidly-evolving COVID-19 pandemic it has become even clearer that our public health data systems are in dire need of upgrades. The President recognized the need for increased funding by including an additional $100 million for CDC's DMI in his FY 2022 budget request. We are grateful that this level of funding was also included in both the House-passed Labor, HHS appropriations package as well as the released draft of the Senate majority Labor, HHS bill. We respectfully request that final FY 2022 appropriations legislation include this critically important $150 million investment for DMI.

COVID-19 will not be the last public health crisis to threaten our nation. We have learned many lessons from this pandemic, including that our public health infrastructure and data systems were not prepared to respond to a highly infectious, fast-moving virus. We need public health systems that are equipped to respond to this and any future public health threat. The way to achieve this is through long-term, sustained federal investments in public health infrastructure and data systems.

Again, we urge you to move quickly to pass the FY 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill and provide at least $150 million for CDC's DMI in FY 2022. Thank you for your consideration of this issue that is so important to our nation's health. If you have questions or wish to discuss this further, please contact Erin Morton at emorton@dc-crd.com.

Sincerely,

Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Big Cities Health Coalition
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems

cc:
The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Roy Blunt
The Honorable Tom Cole