



ADVOCACY GROUP SUPPORTS 'BIOSHIELD' BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

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Washington, DC, May 16, 2003 – Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-partisan public health advocacy organization, lauds the House Energy and Commerce Committee for approving the 'Bioshield' program to support the development of tests, treatments, and vaccines for potential bioterrorism threats.

However, the group cautions that funds and resources devoted to the program do not supplant other public health priorities. TFAH also calls for strong accountability measures to be included within the Bioshield initiative and urged Congress not to write a blank check to the program.

"An effective, responsive public health system is vital to our homeland security. Bioshield has the potential to help thwart attacks and save lives, if it is looked at as an integral part of our overall public health defense," said Shelley A. Hearne, DrPH, Executive Director of TFAH. "We need to stop thinking about public health on a piecemeal basis. Bioterrorism preparedness efforts, like Bioshield and the smallpox vaccinations, should complement and not compete with resources needed for wide range of other epidemics we face, from SARS to cancer."

TFAH supports revitalizing the public health system -- the network of local, state and federal health agencies that collectively are responsible for disease prevention, response and control in the U.S. Currently, the Bush Administration's proposed FY'04 budget includes over \$100 million in proposed cuts to programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which would severely compromise the already strained public health infrastructure.

"Communities should be protected from potential threats of bioterrorism, emerging threats of new diseases like SARS and West Nile Virus, and existing threats posed by the rising rates of chronic diseases," Hearne added. "We need a shield that is strong enough to fight against all of these public health enemies."

TFAH is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.

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