



September 25, 2007

The Honorable Edward Kennedy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to protecting the health of every community, I am writing to express our concern over the Administration's continued failure to prioritize emergency health preparedness. With the leadership of the Senate HELP Committee, Congress passed and the President signed Public Law 109-417, the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA). The legislation included a number of improvements to bioterrorism and public health emergency preparedness efforts. However, nine months after enactment, there is little visible progress in implementation of the statute.

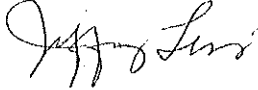
For example, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has yet to meet any of the six-month deadlines set out in the legislation. Under PAHPA, by June 2007, the Secretary was to develop and require the application of measurable evidence-based benchmarks and objective standards that evaluate levels of preparedness. In addition, the Secretary was to develop and disseminate to each state a set of criteria for development of effective state plans to respond to a pandemic flu. To date, no such benchmarks and/or criteria have been made available for public review and/or comment. Delaying the completion of these statutory requirements continues to place Americans at risk and undermines the nation's preparedness.

According to our report *Ready or Not? – Protecting the Public's Health from Diseases, Disasters and Bioterrorism - 2006*, most states are not fully prepared to protect the public from disasters and health emergencies, lacking the communications systems, supply chains, facilities, and personnel to adequately prepare for a disaster. Furthermore, the report found insufficient coordination among responders and levels of government, gaps between the planning and reality of preparedness, and funding cuts that threaten the progress that has been made.

Similar gaps remain for the federal government. In fact, the subheading of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) August 2007 report on pandemic preparedness read – *Further Efforts are Needed to Ensure Clearer Federal Leadership Roles and an Effective National Strategy*. The report found that the Department of Homeland Security and HHS have yet to fully delineate each agency's responsibility in the federal response to public health emergencies, despite several executive branch efforts to clarify leadership roles. The report further found the Administration's pandemic response strategy lacks a clear linkage between activities and objectives and does not address the resources needed to implement preparedness actions. Despite over 200 HHS employees devoted to the task, the GAO reports the Department has yet to release its interim plan for implementing PAHPA.

PAHPA was intended to help transition the federal government toward a more streamlined, agile, and transparent system of emergency response. I urge you to move quickly and judiciously to exercise the HELP Committee's oversight role in seeing the legislation through to its full implementation. If you have any questions, please contact Richard Hamburg, Director of Government Relations, at (202) 223-9876, or Dara Alpert, Government Relations Manager, at (202) 223-9870, ext. 20.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jeffrey Levi".

Jeffrey Levi
Executive Director