

March 10, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Health, Education, Labor and  
Pensions Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor and  
Pensions Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM), one of the largest life science societies comprised of more than 30,000 researchers and health professionals, we thank you for your leadership on preparing the United States for future public health emergencies through your bipartisan work on the PREVENT Pandemics Act. We are committed to working with the Committee members and you to bolster the systems and programs needed to handle both pressing health threats and the inevitable outbreaks of the future.

As a global scientific society that includes scientists conducting basic and clinical research on infectious pathogens, we have been closely following the legislative efforts that would address dual use research of concern and research on potential pandemic pathogens. We appreciate the current language included in Title III, Subtitle B, Improving Biosafety and Biosecurity of the PREVENT Pandemics Act, as it strikes an appropriate balance between safeguarding national security and public health through biosafety and biosecurity measures, while also recognizing the global impact of potential pandemic pathogens, the value and lifesaving potential of research in this area, and the need to study these microbes to address current and future threats.

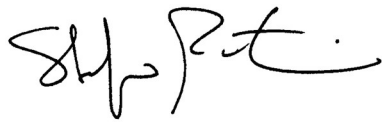
Going beyond the current language to add provisions that would pause or even halt research projects focused on specific viruses, ban specific techniques, or restrict collaboration in specific areas of the world would have implications that extend far beyond the immediate challenge of the current pandemic. **Therefore, we oppose any amendments to the current PREVENT Pandemics Act language that would restrict, pause, or alter federally funded research projects that focus on potential pandemic pathogen research.**

As your bill recognizes, the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) has the requisite scientific expertise to address these issues. Its work is essential to formulating the most effective policies as we move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future seasonal and pandemic threats. We also appreciate the efforts to align policies across federal science agencies with coordination through the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

It is appropriate for these polices and frameworks to be re-evaluated considering lessons learned in the current pandemic and with an eye toward both international engagement and the appropriate balance between biosecurity and the lifesaving value of this research. We believe the bill's inclusion of public and stakeholder input and reporting requirements also is critical because ensuring an appropriate degree of transparency in carrying out the process is important to building trust with the public and the scientific community.

We encourage Congress to continue exercising its oversight responsibilities through provisions such as you have included in the PREVENT Pandemics Act. As one of the world's oldest life science societies whose mission is to advance the microbial sciences, ASM thanks you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stefano Bertuzzi'.

Stefano Bertuzzi, PhD, MPH  
Chief Executive Officer