

February X, 2021

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senate  
709 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baldwin:

The undersigned organizations, institutions, and companies representing a broad range of scientific, public health, and clinical professionals, write to express our support for S. 236, the Tracking COVID-19 Variants Act. Significantly boosting U.S. genetic surveillance and viral sequencing is key to responding to the evolving challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. As new SARS-CoV-2 variants emerge, we need this sequencing capacity to identify, track, and mitigate the impact of these new strains, including conducting epidemiologic investigations to determine the significance of new variants on human health.

We are especially pleased that the bill authorizes up to \$2 billion in emergency supplemental funding for the Advanced Molecular Detection (AMD) program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to bolster and accelerate its ongoing vital work to conduct national sequence-based viral surveillance and integrate genomics and genomic epidemiology. This work has been conducted in part through an innovative public-private partnership, the Sequencing for Public Health Emergency Response, Epidemiology, and Surveillance (SPHERES) Consortium, which includes dozens of members from all segments of the clinical and research laboratory community.

Currently, the U.S. lags far behind other countries in its ability to sequence viral samples. This bill aims to bring our nation up from a sequencing level of 0.3 percent [\(43<sup>rd</sup> in the world\)](#) to a level that allows for sequencing an adequate sample to estimate variant circulation nationally. With much-needed supplemental funding through CDC's AMD program into the combined resources of public health, academic, and clinical laboratories, as well as research institutions and private sector entities, the U.S. will rapidly expand sequencing to provide a complete picture of the circulating virus, its patterns of transmission, and how it is evolving.

Since 2014, the AMD program has employed next generation sequencing (NGS) to bring the concept of precision medicine to bear for "precision public health." AMD has given us new tools to detect disease faster, identify outbreaks sooner, and protect people from emerging and evolving disease threats. The importance of the AMD program and its work to our response to SARS-CoV-2 cannot be overstated, and without the resources authorized in this legislation, we will not be able to reach the level of surveillance needed to protect Americans from the ongoing threat of SARS-CoV-2.

We thank you for introducing this important legislation. We urge its swift enactment by Congress, and we look forward to working with you and your colleagues to meet the moment through more robust genetic surveillance by ensuring CDC's AMD program has the resources it needs to carry out this critical work.

Sincerely,

American Society for Microbiology