

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 17, 2022

The Honorable Dawn O’Connell
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Assistant Secretary O’Connell:

Thank you for your testimony before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) on January 11, 2022. We appreciate your open and thoughtful comments on the Administration’s efforts to end the pandemic and the critical role the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) serves in developing next generation COVID-19 vaccines that are easier to store, ship, and administer and that may prove more durable than the current authorized and approved vaccines. To this end, we request a briefing to better understand the Administration’s plans to support development of next generation COVID-19 vaccines.

Throughout the pandemic, BARDA has played a significant role in development and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, resulting in over 80 percent of Americans aged five and above having received at least one dose of a vaccine.¹ Between December 2020 and June 2021 in the U.S., vaccination saved 240,000 lives and prevented an estimated 14 million infections and over one million hospitalizations.² The data are clear: the currently available vaccines have been very successful in reducing serious illness, hospital admissions, and death. Yet while the first generation of COVID-19 vaccines provided a tremendous return on investment, these vaccines have limited success in preventing forward transmission by vaccinated individuals with breakthrough infections. Further, existing COVID-19 vaccines do not appear to be as durable as many other vaccines, requiring booster shots to continue protection against the virus, particularly with the emergence of variants.

In your testimony you stated, “...we all see the need for next generation vaccines,” and said that BARDA is working with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) to develop a unified research agenda and budget aimed at accelerating the availability of next generation vaccines. This work, according to your testimony, includes identifying promising vaccine candidates and supporting the research of potential candidates in the initial phases of development. We specifically request an update on the status of the unified research

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States, accessed February 16, 2022, https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-total-admin-rate-total.

² Vilches, Thomas N., et al, "Estimating COVID-19 Infections, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Following the US Vaccination Campaigns During the Pandemic," *JAMA network open* 5.1 (2022): e2142725-e2142725, [doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.42725](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.42725).

agenda and budget and further request additional detailed information on BARDA and NIAID's strategy for the development of next generation vaccine candidates.

Thank you for your continued work to protect Americans. We look forward to your response and request a briefing on these issues by March 4, 2022.

Sincerely,



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Mitt Romney
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator