



March 22, 2019

Mr. James F. McDonnell  
Assistant Secretary, Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office  
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)  
1120 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. McDonnell:

On behalf of our member state and local governmental laboratories who perform testing of public health significance, the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) would like to express concerns regarding the deployment of Biodetection (BD)-21 sensors and the lack of information provided to our member laboratories. We respectfully request a meeting with you and key BioWatch Program staff to learn more about the future of BioWatch and to share our specific concerns regarding deployment of BD-21 and response including the use of handheld devices, risk assessment and mitigation strategies, subsequent laboratory testing and epidemiological follow-up.

Since the inception of the BioWatch program in 2003, state and local public health laboratories (PHLs) have played a critical role in laboratory operations by testing environmental samples and coordinating with multiple stakeholders to respond to a BioWatch Actionable Result (BAR). Most of the BioWatch laboratories are co-located within state and local PHLs that also comprise the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Laboratory Response Network (LRN) for Biological Threats Preparedness. Given the scope of the LRN, state and local PHLs rely heavily on CDC for scientific guidance and other technical subject matter expertise. It is unclear to these laboratories whether CDC is fully engaged and aware of DHS's plans for BioWatch. Any response to a DHS placed sensor will rely on local expertise thus it is essential that they are equipped with the scientific knowledge of the performance of the BD-21 sensors and any handheld devices used for field screening.

APHL remains concerned that the continued lack of communication, planning and coordination among federal, state and local partners will negatively impact the ability of BioWatch laboratories to function at their current capabilities. This lack of transparency significantly reduces the confidence of PHLs when responding to a BAR.

APHL is aware DHS will convene a conference call on March 26<sup>th</sup> with state and local PHLs to discuss BD-21 deployment. Following the call, we would like an opportunity to discuss DHS's plan to coordinate with CDC to address state and local PHL needs. During this discussion, APHL would like to address state and local concerns about impacts of technology enhancements and the future of the BioWatch Program. APHL will also share more information on the important role PHLs and the

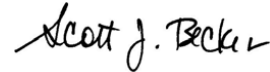
CDC play in the BioWatch Program and the broader role these laboratories play in working with epidemiologists, first responders and others to respond to a BAR.

Thank you for considering these comments and request for a meeting. If you need further information, please contact Ms. Chris Mangal, Director, Public Health Preparedness and Response, [chris.mangal@aphl.org](mailto:chris.mangal@aphl.org) or 240.485.2769.

Sincerely,



Andrew Cannons, Ph.D.  
Chair, APHL Public Health Preparedness and Response Committee



Scott J. Becker, MS  
Executive Director, APHL

Cc:

*Robert P. Kadlec, M.D., Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Department of Health and Human Services*

*Robert R. Redfield, M.D., Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*