

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 27, 2012

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott,

We write to express our concerns regarding the Tuberculosis (TB) outbreak in Florida. As you know, this outbreak originated in Duval County between late 2008 and early 2009, when a schizophrenic patient infected 17 others, most of whom were residents at an assisted living facility for the mentally ill. Half of those patients were infected with FL 046, a very rare and virulent strain of TB. While the number of TB cases throughout Florida has dropped, the number of individuals affected by the FL 046 strain has risen.

This has been referred to as the worst TB outbreak in two decades by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It has mainly affected homeless and mentally ill individuals residing in shelters or assisted living facilities. So far, the TB outbreak has been linked to 13 deaths and 99 illnesses, including six infected children. In addition, over 3,000 people may have been exposed to the strain. The severity of this outbreak led to the intervention of the CDC in 2009, and again in February 2012. Furthermore, we are aware that the state of Florida has asked the CDC for a \$390,000 supplemental grant of which the CDC has designated \$250,000. We understand that an additional request is contemplated for 2013 in order to help locate and treat people exposed to TB.

While we commend the decision to involve the CDC, we are truly disconcerted that news of such an extensive and growing outbreak was not shared with the general public, as well as Florida lawmakers. Even more troubling, it was first revealed by the media only a few days after Florida's only TB hospital, A.G. Holley in Lantana, was closed. The hospital's closure was mandated in March 2012 by the Florida Legislature through the passing of a bill downsizing the Florida Department of Health. You signed the bill into law on April 27, 2012.

As a result, half of the patients have been transferred to Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, while the remaining patients were released back into the general population. A.G. Holley was renowned for treating the toughest cases of TB in the state, both clinically and behaviorally. A.G. Holley's unique protocol for uncooperative and obstinate cases is still the standard for TB treatment and is recognized throughout the medical community. The closing of AG Holley represents a considerable loss of institutional knowledge.

It is our understanding that state lawmakers were not briefed on the Duval TB outbreak at the time the bill was brought to the floor, and that it was never part of the discussion. We are also concerned that, as of today, the outbreak has not been fully contained. While the Florida Department of Health asserted that it is mostly contained within Duval County's homeless and mentally ill population, cases of infection with the FL 046 strain have been confirmed in 17 other counties, all across the state.

Again, we are deeply concerned that in the midst of a TB outbreak, A.G. Holley was closed, and policymakers were not informed of the gravity of the situation. Public safety should be a top priority of your administration, therefore we ask that you immediately share your response plan with the Florida Congressional delegation outlining all pertinent details and implementation strategy regarding handling the outbreak and the closure of A.G. Holley. Additionally, we request that you answer for us, the following questions:

- Which measures have you put in place to ensure that infected individuals are maintaining their routine medical regimen?
- How many of the 3,000 potentially infected individuals have been identified and notified?
- How many patients have been placed in motels, and why were they removed from the hospital setting?
- Why were lawmakers not informed of the outbreak?
- Who was made aware of the outbreak and when were they notified?
- Is the Florida Department of Health able to ensure that the outbreak is being contained, considering that it has been ongoing since 2008, and cases of FL 046 have appeared outside of Duval County in other parts of the state?

We urge your immediate attention to this critically important matter. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to your prompt response.

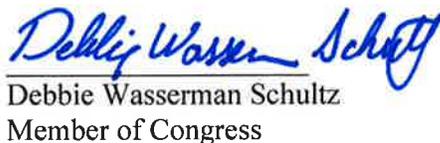
Sincerely,



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



Corrine Brown
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress