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United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

May 20, 2024

The Honorable Dr. Paul Friedrichs
Director of the Office of Pandemic Preparedness
and Response Policy
Executive Office of the President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington D.C., 20500

Dear Dr. Friedrichs,

Since January 2022, the United States has grappled with the spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) among commercial and backyard poultry flocks. This has led to a cascade of effects, including higher food prices and billions of dollars in indemnity payments to affected farmers. However, of greater concern is the recent spread of the virus to dairy cows and cattle. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the March 25, 2024 infection was the first documented case of HPAI spreading to cattle.¹ Subsequently, the CDC confirmed the first human transmission of the disease on April 1, 2024. So far, there have only been 36 dairy herds across nine states that have confirmed cases of HPAI.²

The evolving risk of this disease requires a multi-agency response including the United States Department of Agriculture, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, and state and local partners. The spread of this virus to humans through dairy cattle is a novel situation that requires a coordinated effort amongst agencies and the White House, especially at a critical time when our healthcare system is still recovering from COVID-19. Recent reporting has strongly suggested that hospitals are not ready to take on another pandemic.³

When the Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy (OPPR) was established by Congress in December 2022, it was tasked with playing a critical role in the Federal Government's pandemic preparedness and response efforts. To better understand OPPR's role in addressing the HPAI outbreak, please provide a response to the following questions no later than June 7, 2024.

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/mammals.htm#anchor_1646853078680

² <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p0401-avian-flu.html>

³ <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2024/05/hospitals-on-avian-flu-outbreak-00155540>

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1. What outreach and coordination efforts has OPPR undertaken with state and local entities, as well as international partners, since the first confirmed transmission of HPAI to humans on April 1, 2024?
2. Has OPPR provided any guidance to federal agencies on ways to streamline the response to the HPAI spread amongst cows and humans?
3. What was OPPR's initial assessment of HPAI and how has your assessment and response changed as it continues to spread?
4. What preparation, coordination, or support does OPPR give agencies in the event of a spreading novel or concerning disease as with the case of HPAI?

I also urge you to work with colleagues in the Department of Defense and Intelligence Community to monitor the spread of the outbreak overseas to ensure your office is able to account for any development in the virus abroad.

I look forward to working with OPPR as we address this outbreak at this critical point in time during America's recovery from COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kirsten" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Gillibrand".

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator