October 4, 2017

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and communities, I write in strong opposition to the House FY 2018 budget resolution, H. Con. Res. 71. This proposal does not eliminate sequestration and would drastically cut nondefense discretionary spending. Such cuts would devastate our nation’s public health and safety net system and would have a disproportionate impact on our nation’s most vulnerable citizens. The proposal also includes the House-passed repeal of the Affordable Care Act that would force millions to lose coverage, end the Medicaid expansion, drastically reduce federal funding for the Medicaid program and lead to increased costs and fewer benefits for millions of Americans.

We are deeply troubled that the proposal once again calls for unacceptable and extreme cuts to nondefense discretionary spending. Over the next decade, the proposal would cut nondefense discretionary spending by $1.3 trillion. Continued cuts to nondefense discretionary programs jeopardize efforts to reduce the burden of chronic disease. The cuts would weaken our ability to ensure that we are prepared and protected in the event of a disease outbreak, natural disaster or other health emergency. Simply put, our federal, state and local public health agencies will not be able to do their jobs to protect the health of the American people if these drastic cuts are enacted. The long-term medical and human costs of disinvestment will far outweigh the savings.

The proposal also calls for the enactment of the House-passed legislation to repeal the ACA and additional cuts to important health programs. Not only would this lead to 23 million additional uninsured Americans over the next decade, it would also make major changes to Medicaid and other health programs, cutting funding by $1.5 trillion over the decade. Such a move would turn back the clock on our progress in changing our health system to one that focuses on keeping people healthy rather than treating the sick. The ACA has made progress in addressing the biggest challenges facing our health system including the rising costs associated with our health care system, uneven quality of care, deaths due to medical errors, discriminatory practices by health insurance providers and the shrinking ranks of the nation's primary care providers. The budget resolution would also repeal the Prevention and Public Health Fund. The fund has already provided more than $6 billion to support a variety of public health activities in every state including tracking and preventing infectious diseases like the Ebola and Zika viruses, community and clinical prevention programs, preventing childhood lead poisoning and expanding access to childhood immunizations. Eliminating the fund would devastate the budget of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The fund currently makes up 12 percent of CDC’s budget and...
eliminating this funding stream would force Congress to replace the funding through the regular appropriations process where resources for nondefense discretionary programs are already too low.

We are also disappointed with the budget’s proposal to turn the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program into a block grant, cutting an estimated $150 billion from the program over 10 years. SNAP provides critical food assistance to millions of struggling families. Cuts of this magnitude would cause millions of families and their children to lose their benefits or see them significantly reduced in this time of increased need.

The proposal would also cut nearly $500 billion from Medicare over the next decade and turn the program into a voucher program beginning in 2024, likely leading to increased costs and forcing seniors out of the traditional Medicare program.

We urge you to oppose the House FY 2018 budget resolution and instead, work to develop a bipartisan plan that invests in important nondefense discretionary programs including public health and prevention, supports efforts to make comprehensive health insurance coverage available to all Americans and creates a healthier nation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director