



October 26, 2021

The Honorable Anna Eshoo  
Chair  
Health Subcommittee  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Ranking Member  
Health Subcommittee  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Eshoo and Ranking Member Guthrie:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I thank you for including H.R. 3297, the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Act of 2021 in today's Subcommittee on Health hearing. We welcome the opportunity to submit this letter for the record in support of this critical legislation that will help to strengthen our state, local, tribal and territorial public health departments and workforce as they continue to respond to COVID-19 and the many other health threats we face as a nation.

Our nation's dedicated public health workers, including physicians, nurses, public health officials, epidemiologists, and many others, are working every day to save lives and protect the health of our communities. Unfortunately, across the country, local and state health departments have lost more than 20% of their workforce since 2008.<sup>1</sup> In addition, in recent months, many of these dedicated individuals have been questioned or even vilified by some in their communities, have faced threats of violence both at work and at home and others have been fired due to political pressure or have resigned due to lack of support and burnout. A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that more than half of all public health workers have experienced a mental health condition this year.<sup>2</sup>

We strongly urge Congress to pass H.R. 3297 which would authorize much needed funding for a public health workforce loan repayment program. Congress must also appropriate funding for this important program that will help incentivize new and recent graduates to join the governmental public health workforce, encourage them to stay in these roles and improve diversity. The public health workforce is the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system at the county, city, state and tribal levels. These skilled professionals deliver critical public health programs and services and lead efforts to ensure the tracking and

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of County and City Health Officials, "NACCHO's 2019 Profile Study: Changes in Local Health Department Workforce and Finance Capacity Since 2008." Research brief, May 2020.

<sup>2</sup> MMWR. Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Suicidal Ideation Among State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Public Health Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, March–April 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7026e1.htm>.

surveillance of infectious disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19, prepare for and respond to natural and man-made disasters, and ensure the safety of the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink. While we are grateful for the temporary emergency funding Congress has provided to support the public health response to COVID-19, we must also establish sustainable, robust and long-term funding for our workforce and our many other public health infrastructure needs.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing. We look forward to working with you and other members of Congress to pass this legislation and other measures to ensure our nation's public health system and workforce are adequately funded to improve and the public's health and wellbeing and to protect our communities from future pandemics and other public health emergencies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "G".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD  
Executive Director