The American Society for Microbiology (ASM) applauds Congress for negotiating the bipartisan Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. ASM and its members have been actively advocating with Congress, federal agencies and the White House Coronavirus Task Force for increased funding for research and public health agencies, for laboratory diagnostic flexibility, and for provisions that ensure that laboratory and health care professionals have the tools and materials required on the front lines of this pandemic.

ASM commends Congress for including provisions that do the following:

- Provide direct aid to health care institutions on the front line of this crisis;
- Require coverage of COVID-19 diagnostic tests, vaccines and treatment;
- Require inclusion of diagnostics, swabs and test kits in the Strategic National Stockpile;
- Delay scheduled cuts in Medicare payments for clinical laboratory diagnostic tests; and,
- Call for a National Academies study on the security of the U.S. medical supply chain.

While we expect more federal action will be necessary in both the short and long-term, ASM appreciates the desperately needed funding for public health, preparedness and research agencies that this bill provides. This funding includes $4.3 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which will be allocated to urgent and critical needs including enhanced nationwide surveillance, diagnostics, and laboratory support. ASM has advocated strongly for more support for these programs in light of the current pandemic’s impact on CDC’s infrastructure and capacity, including the advanced molecular detection program.

ASM also supports the inclusion of an additional $706 million over the next five years to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) for continued, groundbreaking research toward the development of therapeutics and vaccines against COVID-19. The $3.5 billion included for the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) will help expand on NIAID’s work and facilitate the production of vaccines,
therapeutics, and diagnostics, including serology tests, which ASM members have stressed are important to fully address and understand the virus in the long-term.

The funding and authorizing provisions included in this legislation represent important, necessary steps to help preserve our research ecosystem, our public health infrastructure, and assist clinicians and patients as we address this serious threat to the health and well-being of Americans. We also appreciate that the bill aims to set a plan into motion that will facilitate sustained support as the pandemic continues, and lays the groundwork for better preparedness in months to come.

ASM will continue to work with Congress, the White House Coronavirus Task Force, and federal health agencies to ensure our nation’s response to the pandemic leads with science and public health, and maintains open and timely communication with the public.

We urge Congress to move swiftly to pass this bill and send it to the President for his signature.

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The American Society for Microbiology is one of the largest professional societies dedicated to the life sciences and is comprised of 30,000 scientists and health practitioners. ASM’s mission is to promote and advance the microbial sciences.

ASM advances the microbial sciences through conferences, publications, certifications and educational opportunities. It enhances laboratory capacity around the globe through training and resources. It provides a network for scientists in academia, industry and clinical settings. Additionally, ASM promotes a deeper understanding of the microbial sciences to diverse audiences.