

**Statement from the American Society for Microbiology
in response to the
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Hearing:
“COVID-19: Lessons Learned to Prepare for the Next Pandemic”
June 23, 2020**

On behalf of our 30,000 members in the United States and around the world, the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) thanks Chairman Lamar Alexander, Ranking Member Patty Murray, and members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee for holding this hearing to review lessons learned from past global infectious disease outbreaks and the current COVID-19 pandemic, and to discuss how we can better prepare for future pandemics. We also wish to express our appreciation to the Chairman for issuing a white paper on this subject with a call for comments. This is an important first step to ensuring a better response in the future, and ASM looks forward to providing more specific comments to the Committee.

As soon as the public health emergency subsides, Congress and the Administration must initiate a high-level, broad-based, comprehensive and scientific review of the COVID-19 response through either a federal commission or a qualified, nonpartisan entity such as the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. This process should also be forward-looking and make cross-cutting recommendations on how the United States can better prepare for future public health emergencies, including funding needs and policy changes. By fully understanding what went well and what did not during this most recent pandemic, we can help thwart, or at the very least minimize, the effects of the next pandemic.

Attached is a stakeholder letter dated March 30, 2020 spearheaded by ASM and signed by 38 additional national and international organizations, calling for a science-based review. ASM believes a high-level, comprehensive pandemic response review should make recommendations to do the following:

- Ensure global collaboration and open lines of communication with our international partners;
- More rapidly scale up laboratory testing capacity in order to get tests to those who need them;
- Ensure a steady supply chain of materials to labs and hospitals to mitigate shortages;
- Clearly and effectively communicate practical, science-based information and guidance to stakeholder entities and to the public; and
- Reduce patient access barriers so that all who need testing can get testing.

The current crisis has brought to light a number of barriers, challenges and shortcomings in our ability to respond to a public health emergency. Some of these were the results of “real-time” decision-making, while others exposed systemic breakdowns, chronic underfunding, and a lack of resources that were years—if not decades—in the making. These cut across multiple agencies and span levels of government from federal, to state, to local authorities.

While ASM members in clinical laboratories have the most immediate connection to the current crisis, our members work in several areas that will be critical to a long-term strategy to head off future pandemics. These include conducting basic biomedical research, vaccine development, and service delivery in clinical laboratory settings.

ASM stands ready to work with you to help improve the systems we have in place today and to develop the solutions that will help address tomorrow’s challenges.

ASM reiterates our commitment to assisting the Committee, its members, the Congress, the White House Coronavirus Task Force and the agencies as the U.S. continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. More information from ASM on nCov2019: <https://asm.org/Press-Releases/2020/COVID-19-Resources>

###

The American Society for Microbiology is one of the largest professional societies dedicated to the life sciences and is composed 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.