

HHS Intentions on Tick-Borne Diseases Working Group Announced



The Lyme Disease Association announced that early today, July 14, the US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) released its intent to establish the Tick-Borne Disease (TBD) Working Group called for in Section 2062 of the 21st Century Cures Act. The working group will assist HHS in its efforts to conduct and support epidemiological, basic, translational and clinical research related to vector-borne diseases, including tick-borne diseases. The working group will function as a Federal Advisory Committee and its activities will be overseen by HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health.

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Language to create the TBD Working Group was incorporated into the 21st Century Cures Act, thanks to the work of Congressman Chris Gibson, advocates, and Lyme Caucus Co-Chair Congressman Chris Smith who all carefully monitored the progress of the Lyme disease bill they supported that was introduced into the House in 2015 (HR 789 Gibson- NY). There was intense

grassroots lobbying efforts to ensure the language in the bill was beneficial to patients. Subsequently, some of that language was incorporated into the 21st Century Cures Act passed by the House. The Senate, however, wanted to write its own Cures Act and weakened that Lyme language, and the Lyme community had to fight to get it back. Successful negotiations with House Leadership were led by LDA President Pat Smith and a team of advocates to have the stronger language reinstated into 21st Century Cures, which enabled the Working Group to have a seat at the table for some of the most important stakeholders: patients/advocates and treating physicians.

The working group's mission will be to review all the efforts within HHS related to tick-borne diseases, to examine research priorities, to help ensure interagency coordination and to minimize overlap. The working group will be made up of representatives from both federal and non-federal agencies and entities.

HHS is seeking nominations for non-federal members through August 15, 2017. Information is available in the Federal Register

Notice:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/07/17/2017-14965/requests-for-nominations-tick-borne-disease-working-group>

In other information from Washington, DC, the House passed HR 2810 authorization for appropriations for fiscal year 2018 for military activities of the Department of Defense. It contained an amendment from US Representative Bill Keating (MA) that permits the DOD to partner with medical researchers and universities to test for tick-borne illnesses.