



Lyme Disease Association, Inc.

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October 29, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Welfare & Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Welfare & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Murray:

I am writing on behalf of the national non-profit Lyme Disease Association, Inc. to ask for your support for S.1657, The TICK Act, at your next full Committee markup on Thursday, October 31, 2019.

The purpose of the Act is to establish an Office of Oversight and Coordination at HHS; to develop a National Strategy to expand research, to improve testing and treatment to fight tick-borne diseases; to reauthorize \$10 million/year over 5 years for Regional Centers of Excellence in Vector-Borne Disease; to authorize \$20 million/year over 5 years in CDC Grants to States and communities for surveillance, prevention, testing, and treatment.

Since Lyme disease was first investigated by public health 44 years ago, the ticks which carry Lyme disease have spread to 50% of US counties, another strain of bacteria has been found to cause Lyme in the Midwest, and Lyme has been joined by ~19 other tick-borne diseases and conditions, which are found not only in the Northeast but in regions of the US where Lyme may be considered low incidence. Several of these diseases are viral and have no treatment other than palliative care and have high fatality rates. Powassan, e.g., not only has a high death rate, can be transmitted within minutes of a tick bite, but also leaves 50% of survivors with permanent severe neurologic complications such as muscle loss and memory loss. Sadly, it has just been announced that former North Carolina Senator Kay Hagen has died from Powassan after battling encephalitis for 3 years. The potentially fatal virus is transmitted by the same blacklegged tick that transmits Lyme disease.

The blacklegged tick can transmit 6 other diseases plus tick paralysis toxin that paralyzes its victims. In the Northeast, South, Midwest and West, Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) has been transmitted by the American dog tick and the Rocky Mountain Wood tick, and cases are rising. CDC says giving doxycycline is most effective at preventing severe disease and death when given within 5 days of symptom onset. Unfortunately, says CDC, that is not always happening, especially in cases of children below 8 years old, as doctors are unaware that should be the protocol for those children. A study in TN with high RMSF incidence, showed only 39% of providers would prescribe doxy to that age group. For decades, the public was told the brown dog tick, which carries RMS, only bit dogs, so it could not transmit it to humans. Now, CDC reports that in Arizona, the brown dog ticks are infecting humans with this potentially fatal disease, and there is a huge increase in RMSF cases across the border in several Mexican states.

Also along the border, Texas cattle ranches have been quarantined due to heavy tick infestations transmitting *Babesia*, killing the cattle, and some ranches have shut down due to economic hardship. A new tick, *H. longicornis*, was found in NJ in 2017, over 1,000 ticks on a sheep. This invasive species from Asia is already now in VA, WV, AR, NC, NY, PA, CT, NH, KY, MD, and TN. West Virginia announced in 2019 that 5 cows were killed, each had ~1,000 *longicornis* ticks. These ticks do not need a male tick to reproduce, they are self-cloning, readily populating an area. Additionally, across the US, people bitten by lone star ticks--which range from Maine to Minnesota to the southern border—are developing a severe red meat allergy and can go into shock from eating red meat or products made from red meat. Little is known about it and currently there is no cure. We need help. You can provide the tools to stop these tick-borne diseases epidemics. Support S.1657. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Patricia V. Smith

Patricia V. Smith, President