July 24, 2017

Brenda Fitzgerald, MD
Director
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Dr. Fitzgerald,

On behalf of the 28 members of the Big Cities Health Coalition (BCHC), congratulations on your appointment! We look forward to working with you to continue to make strides in getting and keeping our nation’s communities healthy and safe. BCHC is a forum for leaders of America’s largest metropolitan health departments to exchange strategies and jointly address issues to promote and protect the health and safety of the 54 million people we serve.

The Coalition’s vision is: Healthy, more equitable communities through big city innovation and leadership. Our mission is Advancing equity and health for present and future generations.

As a former state health official you well know the importance of CDC’s Office State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Support (OSTLTs). It has been instrumental to our local health departments, as well as all health departments across the country, and the Coalition has worked particularly closely with Dr. Judith Monroe, John Auerbach, and the current Director, Dr. Jose Montero, over the past several years. We have often exchanged key information and discussed a variety of local health issues, as well as the various challenges and opportunities happening on the ground.

As you know, OSTLTs is fairly new to CDC family. Many of the current functions OSTLTs now has, such as funding agreements and relationships with public health officials, were spread across the agency’s many centers. OSTLTs’ charge is to support and improve public health at all levels – and centralizing many of the functions has been immensely helpful to our work. To that end, outlined below are a number ways OSTLTs supports our big city health departments.

- **Funding:** OSTLTs has been a true partner with the Coalition and our members in thinking through how to get needed resources to those on the ground in the most efficient way possible. Most cooperative agreements that provide funding to local health departments are now coordinated through OSTLTs rather than various CDC Centers. OSTLTs, we believe, understands the importance of getting dollars to local communities and has advocated for sending money directly to large cities, as appropriate. Most of our health departments have the capacity to undertake a number of projects directly rather than receive dollars through the state.
The Public Health Associate Program (PHAP): The PHAP program is a competitive two year training program for recent graduates which places associates in health departments across the country with the financial support of CDC. This program provides needed public health expertise at the local level in an extremely efficient manner for local health departments, which are often hampered by difficult hiring structures and limited funding. There are currently 150 PHAPs with about 100 currently placed across 20 of 28 member cities. We recently learned of losses to this program, which presents challenges for our members in the short term, and is detrimental to the overall workforce pipeline in the longer term. We urge you to consider making this program whole again as you consider Agency priorities.

New Health Official Orientation: Each year OSTLTs convenes an orientation program for new governmental public health officials. For the last three years, BCHC has worked with OSTLTs to insure our new members are able to attend this training. They have found it extremely helpful to learn about OSTLTs and CDC, as well as meet and collaborate with their peers from across the country.

Advisory Committees and “Think Tanks”: We are so pleased that several BCHC members and alumni – Tom Farley, Philadelphia; LaQuandra Nesbitt, Washington, DC; and Wilma Wooten, San Diego County; and Jonathan Fielding, LA County and David Fleming, Seattle-King County – sit on the Advisory Committee to the Director. OSTLTs also convenes the STLT Subcommittee, which, in addition to those above, includes Julie Morita from Chicago, who also chairs the Social Determinants think tank. Several other members are also a part of the Public Health Surveillance and Public Health Finance think tanks.

Again, congratulations! We will be in touch soon to arrange a meeting, but please do not hesitate to reach out to Chrissie Juliano, Director, BCHC (cjuliano@naccho.org), if we can be of assistance in the near term.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Musicant, MPH, BSN
Chair, Big Cities Health Coalition
Health Commissioner, Minneapolis (MN)

Vinny Taneja, MBBS, MPH
Chair-Elect, Big Cities Health Coalition
Health Director, Tarrant County (TX)

Kelly Colopy, MPP
Vice Chair, Big Cities Health Coalition
Health Director, Long Beach (CA)

Chrissie Juliano, MPP
Director, Big Cities Health Coalition