

February 12, 2025

The Honorable Mike Waltz  
National Security Advisor  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear. Mr. Waltz,

The United States is once again in the midst of a growing national and public health security crisis with the rapid spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 (hereinafter “H5N1”) across the country. Already this year, over 20 million egg-laying chickens have died due to H5N1, egg prices and shortages continue to rise, and Louisiana reported the first human death from H5N1 in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Within the past week, the same strain of bird flu (D1.1) that infected the Louisiana patient who died has now infected dairy cows in Nevada, with one dairy worker confirmed to be infected with D1.1.<sup>2</sup>

The Administration’s actions, including an incredibly harmful “pause” on time-sensitive and critical public health communications from key federal agencies, risk missing key indicators of threats and exacerbating the likelihood of another deadly pandemic. At a time when influenza rates across the country have reached their highest levels since the 2009 swine flu, there have been delays in providing access to critical data relied on by scientists and doctors across the country to provide updates on influenza cases. Inexplicably, the Administration has reportedly withheld from publication three key studies on H5N1.<sup>3</sup> The Administration’s other legally questionable reported actions—stopping any new funding for critical scientific research, freezing federal funding to key health programs, and declaring an intent to withdraw the United States from the World Health Organization—only make this threat worse.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Confirmations of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Commercial and Backyard Flocks (Feb. 7, 2025) ([www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/commercial-backyard-flocks](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/commercial-backyard-flocks)); *Egg Prices Are High. They Will Likely Go Higher.*, *New York Times* (Jan. 24, 2025) ([www.nytimes.com/2025/01/24/business/egg-shortage-prices.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/24/business/egg-shortage-prices.html)); Louisiana Department of Health, *LDH reports first U.S. H5N1-related human death* (Jan. 6, 2025) ([ldh.la.gov/news/H5N1-death](http://ldh.la.gov/news/H5N1-death)).

<sup>2</sup> *New version of bird flu infects Nevada dairy worker*, *Washington Post* (Feb. 11, 2025) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/02/10/bird-flu-nevada-dairy-worker-infected/>).

<sup>3</sup> *CDC scientific report resumes publication after unprecedented pause*, *Washington Post* (Feb. 6, 2025) ([www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/02/06/cdc-mmwr-bird-flu-public-health-communication/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/02/06/cdc-mmwr-bird-flu-public-health-communication/)); *Flu levels now highest since 2009 pandemic, CDC reports*, *CBS News* (Feb. 7, 2025) ([www.cbsnews.com/news/flu-levels-highest-since-2009-pandemic-cdc-reports/](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/flu-levels-highest-since-2009-pandemic-cdc-reports/)); *Trump officials exerting unprecedented control over CDC scientific journal*, *CBS News* (Feb. 7, 2025) ([www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-officials-influence-cdc-mmwr/](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-officials-influence-cdc-mmwr/)).

<sup>4</sup> Exec. Order No. 14155, 90 Fed. Reg. 8361 (Jan. 29, 2025); Office of Management and Budget, *Instructions for Federal Financial Assistance Program in Support of M-25-13* (Feb. 2025) ([www.politico.com/f/?id=00000194-ad9c-de9c-a5b6-efbd29400000](http://www.politico.com/f/?id=00000194-ad9c-de9c-a5b6-efbd29400000)); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Current Week: U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report* ([www.cdc.gov/fluview/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/fluview/index.html)) (accessed Feb. 9, 2025).

As the H5N1 virus continues to infect wild birds, poultry flocks, and dairy cattle across the country, it has been detected in all fifty states and Puerto Rico, with 68 reported human cases in 11 states throughout the U.S.<sup>5</sup> In Michigan, H5N1 has been identified in 25 counties and two farm workers tested positive for the virus last year.<sup>6</sup> This worsening outbreak poses a dual threat to both human health and our food supply. Case numbers are rising – disproportionately affecting farmers across the country – and the economic ramifications are already being felt, with the cost of eggs having more than doubled over the past year.<sup>7</sup> Every day, Americans across the country go to the grocery store only to find prices for eggs, if available, nearing \$5.00 per dozen with projections that prices will increase by an additional 20 percent this year.<sup>8</sup>

While agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have allocated modest resources toward H5N1 testing, surveillance, and research, there does not appear to be a robust and coordinated effort led by the White House to swiftly and effectively prevent, detect, and respond to the worsening H5N1 outbreak. We are at a critical juncture and must work to mitigate H5N1 transmission among affected animals to ensure the virus does not eventually adapt to spread easily between humans, resulting in human-to-human transmission like the virus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us the importance of early and prompt action, clear roles and responsibilities, regular and unified communication, and most importantly, the severe consequences of a delayed response.<sup>9</sup>

I request that the White House, including the Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy (OPPR) and relevant executive branch agencies, take immediate and necessary measures to ensure transparent, unified, and regular communications with the public about the H5N1 outbreak. Public health communications must not be interrupted. This includes updates on H5N1 infections in humans or animals; guidance on testing, contact tracing, or other prevention and response efforts; information on signs, symptoms, and other information necessary for timely and accurate medical care; distribution of medical supplies to include

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<sup>5</sup> Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, United States Department of Agriculture, *Confirmations of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Commercial and Backyard Flocks* (Feb. 7, 2025) ([www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/commercial-backyard-flocks](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/commercial-backyard-flocks)); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation* (Feb. 7, 2025) ([www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html)).

<sup>6</sup> *Northern Michigan reports latest bird flu outbreak*, MLive (Feb. 3, 2025) (<https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2025/02/northern-michigan-reports-latest-bird-flu-outbreak.html>); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Newsroom, *CDC Confirms Second Human H5 Bird Flu Case in Michigan; Third Case Tied to Dairy Outbreak* (May 30, 2024) (<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p0530-h5-human-case-michigan.html>).

<sup>7</sup> Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, *Average Price: Eggs, Grade A, Large (Cost per Dozen) in U.S. City Average* (fred.stlouisfed.org/series/APU0000708111 (accessed Feb. 7, 2025)).

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, AMS Livestock and Poultry Program, *Egg Markets Overview* (Feb. 7, 2025) ([www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/ams\\_3725.pdf](http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/ams_3725.pdf)); United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Food Price Outlook* (Jan. 24, 2025) ([www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/)).

<sup>9</sup> Majority Staff, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Historically Unprepared: Examination of the Federal Government's Pandemic Preparedness and Initial COVID-19 Response* (Dec. 8, 2022).

personal protective equipment and tests; publication of scientific research on the virus; and answering questions from Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, the public and animal health communities, the medical community, and other relevant parties.

To ensure OPPR is carrying out its statutory duties and coordinating activities to prepare for and respond to pandemic and other biological threats, including the worsening H5N1 outbreak, I request the following information by February 19, 2025.

1. A list of the positions currently supporting the H5N1 outbreak within the Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy, the National Security Council, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy on biodefense, global health security, pandemic preparedness or response, and public health. If a statutorily mandated position is currently vacant, please indicate that and provide an anticipated date when the position will be filled.
2. Presentations and/or Reports on the H5N1 outbreak provided to the White House, the Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response, and the National Security Council (NSC) by HHS (including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response) and/or the USDA from November 2024 through the present.
3. Any Directives, Reports, or Presentations related to H5N1 prepared by the OPPR Director pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 300hh-3(b)(2) from November 2024 through the present.
4. Any drills and operational exercises to assess preparedness for and responses to potential threats, including H5N1, prepared by the OPPR Director pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 300hh-3(b)(2)(I) or the National Security Council from November 2024 through the present.
5. Any Directives, including memoranda and emails, sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention directing the agency to pause any research, communications, and/or reporting related to H5N1.

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV (k)(2)(B) of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate matters that aid the Committee in “studying the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government.”<sup>10</sup> Under Senate Resolution 59, Sec. 12(e)(2), of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Committee’s investigative duties “shall not be construed to be limited to the records, functions, and operations of any particular branch of the Government and may extend to the records and activities of any persons, corporation, or other entity.”<sup>11</sup>

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

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<sup>10</sup> S. Rule XXV(k)(2)(B).

<sup>11</sup> S. Res. 59, Sec. 12(e)(2).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary C. Peters". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Gary C. Peters  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Homeland  
Security and Governmental Affairs