

# Sen. Baldwin, Colleagues: Introduce bipartisan Tracking Pathogens Act to prepare for future pandemics, identify emerging threats

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Bill Cassidy, M.D. (R-LA) introduced the bipartisan *Tracking Pathogens Act* to enhance the United States' ability to prepare for future pandemics and strengthen our nation's efforts to identify new viral threats through genetic surveillance and genomic sequencing. Through genomic sequencing, the United States has been able to identify, survey, and understand emerging variants of the novel coronavirus, as well as other pathogens. National sequence-based surveillance provides a picture of circulating pathogens, patterns in transmission and introduction, and context to better respond to and prepare for pandemics. This information will also provide data to assess vaccine effectiveness and, if necessary, inform new vaccine formulations.

“Unfortunately, it is not ‘if’ but ‘when’ our nation will face another pandemic and we must be better prepared than we were for COVID-19 to track new threats and mitigate the virus,” **said Senator Baldwin**. “I am proud to introduce the bipartisan *Tracking Pathogens Act* to increase the United States' preparedness for future pandemics by ensuring we can effectively identify new pathogens and act quickly to best respond to them to keep our communities safe.”

“Plain and simple, we need to be better prepared for the next pandemic,” **said Dr. Cassidy**. “This bill increases our ability to identify, prevent, and respond to new variants and pathogens.”

“As this winter's COVID surge has proven, we must leverage every tool at our

disposal to predict, track, and respond to emerging pathogens. I am once again so proud of Senator Baldwin's leadership in this area, and welcome the introduction of the bipartisan Tracking Pathogens Act as part of our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and our preparation for future outbreaks. The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health enthusiastically endorses this legislation," **said Robert N. Golden, MD, Dean, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.**

"The American Society for Microbiology thanks Senator Baldwin and Senator Cassidy for their leadership on this important bill, which builds on the significant investments made in genomic sequencing and surveillance through CDC in the American Rescue Plan. The U.S. should be the world leader in advanced molecular detection (AMD), whether it is to address seasonal threats, detect and halt the spread of foodborne pathogens or tackle the next pandemic. ASM members in research and clinical laboratories are at the forefront of these efforts. The bill charts a course for supporting AMD as we move beyond COVID-19 by strengthening public health partnerships with academia, clinical and independent laboratories and training the workforce of the future. This will ensure that in the future, cutting edge technology will continue to be deployed on the front lines of public health," **said Stefano Bertuzzi, PhD, CEO of the American Society for Microbiology.**

"The COVID-19 pandemic exposed a critical global need to advance innovation in genetic surveillance and genomic sequencing to track the evolution of pathogens like SARS-CoV-2," **said Karen Nelson, Chief Scientific Officer, Thermo Fisher Scientific.** "Investing in new sequencing approaches, genomics technology and training programs will help scientists and public health professionals better prepare for, and respond, to future pathogenic diseases. We're grateful to Senator Baldwin and Senator Cassidy for their leadership in raising awareness and supporting crucial investments in this field."

"The U.S. urgently needs a nation-wide, genomic, pathogen surveillance network to rapidly detect and track emerging outbreaks. Illumina supports the bipartisan "Tracking Pathogens Act" and commends Senators Tammy Baldwin and Bill Cassidy for spearheading Congressional efforts on this critical public health and national defense priority," **said Francis deSouza, CEO, Illumina.**

"Genomic sequencing is a critical component of disease surveillance to detect, track, and contain emerging pathogens. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of having access to real-time data that can signal new threats early,

before they become serious outbreaks. The Tracking Pathogens Act is an important step in ensuring the nation will have the capacity to confront head on the next novel infectious disease,” said **Sharon B. Wright, MD, MPH, FIDSA, FSHEA, President, The Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA).**

The *Tracking Pathogens Act* would enhance the United States’ ability to prepare for future pandemics and strengthen our ability to conduct genomic sequencing for pathogens by:

- **Issuing Guidance:** Issuing guidance to support collaborations for genomic sequencing, including the use of new and innovative approaches and technology for the detection, characterization, and sequencing of pathogens, to improve public health surveillance and preparedness and response activities
- **Supporting and Enhancing Sequencing Activities:** Directing government health agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and National Institutes of Health (NIH), to expand and improve activities related to genomic sequencing by:
  - Continuing and expanding activities to identify and respond to emerging infectious disease threats, including by identifying the use of advanced technology to inform surveillance activities;
  - Seeking new partnerships between public health laboratories and the larger health infrastructure to expand the reach of sequencing programs;
  - Providing technical assistance and guidance to State, Tribal, local and territorial public health departments to increase capacity for sequencing;
  - Enhancing the capabilities of the public health workforce focused on pathogen genomics, epidemiology, and bioinformatics;
- **Establishing Centers of Excellence:** Awarding grants to public health agencies and partnerships to establish centers of excellence to promote innovation in pathogen genomics and molecular epidemiology. Established Centers would:
  - Identify and evaluate technologies that may advance public health preparedness, and improve tools for integrating and analyzing genomic and epidemiologic data;
  - Assist with genomic surveillance of, and response to, infectious diseases;
  - Conduct applied research to improve public health surveillance and response to infectious diseases;
  - Develop and provide training materials for experts in the fields of genomics, microbiology, bioinformatics, epidemiology, and other fields;

- Conduct workforce development through advanced training in academic labs
- **Authorize sustained funding:** Allot \$175 million per year for FY23-27 for genetic surveillance and genomic sequencing

Senator Baldwin has been focused on preparedness since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Early on, she championed additional funding for the CDC to track variants of the novel coronavirus and was able to secure a [\\$1.7 billion investment in the American Rescue Plan](#) to support this effort. As a result of this investment, CDC has dramatically scaled up its sequencing efforts, and was able to more quickly identify the Omicron variant.

The legislation is supported by the American Association for Clinical Chemistry; American Institute of Biological Sciences; American Society for Clinical Pathology; American Society for Microbiology; American Society for Virology; American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene; Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology; Association of American Medical Colleges; Association of Molecular Pathology; Biophysical Society; Clear Labs; Coalition for the Life Sciences; Emory University; Gingko Bioworks; Illumina; Infectious Diseases Society of America; Lab Corp; Pacific Biosciences; Psomagen; Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America; The Gerontological Society of America; The Jackson Laboratory; Thermo Fisher Scientific; Trust for America's Health; University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.

A copy of the legislation can be found [here](#).

A one-pager on the legislation can be found [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).