



June 30, 2021

The Honorable Dawn O'Connell, JD  
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Ms. O'Connell:

America's Blood Centers (ABC) welcomes you to the role of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. As an essential part of the health care system, a safe and robust blood supply is particularly imperative during all disasters both for blood needs related to the disaster as well as for ordinary blood usage.

ABC brings together community-based independent blood centers who collectively provide nearly 60 percent of the U.S. blood supply. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ABC partnered with the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) to ensure COVID-19 Convalescent Plasma (CCP) was available for all patients in need. The BARDA contract provided essential startup costs as well as payment upon collection that allowed the independent community-based blood centers and hospital blood banks to collect about 75 percent of all CCP collected and used for patient care.

The blood supply needs to be considered early and often in the disaster preparedness process. The Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Innovation Act (PAHPIA) took a substantial step towards this goal, but more work is necessary to make the mandate of that law into a reality. Through ABC's participation as a health care readiness partner, we have been able to increase awareness within the health care community of the need to consider the blood supply in readiness planning, however, more work remains. We look forward to continuing to work with your office to ensure the essential role of the blood supply is enshrined in all disaster preparedness efforts.

A safe and available blood supply is a core component of the U.S. healthcare system. Blood has a shelf life of up to 42 days for red blood cells and only a few days for platelets, thereby requiring constant and regular collection from healthy individuals to sustain the nation's blood supply. A wide range of patients need blood transfusions, including new mothers who may have experienced complications during delivery, patients with cancer who require blood as part of their regular treatment regimen, people with sickle cell disease who require ongoing blood transfusions to remain healthy, trauma victims who experience significant blood loss, patients who require surgery and need blood to ensure a healthy recovery, and many others.

For the past several years, the blood community and our government partners have examined the resilience of the blood supply and policy changes required to ensure blood centers can continue their mission of providing life-saving blood components for patients in need. Among these



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recommended changes is an increased focus on promoting a robust and available pool of blood donors. The current donor base has been increasingly strained by evolving societal norms and behaviors, loss of traditional venues for blood drives, including workplaces and schools, and increased donor deferrals stemming from regulatory changes. In addition, unfunded federal mandates, decreased utilization of blood, and changing hospital practices have all resulted in blood centers operating at break-even margins.

The COVID-19 pandemic and 2020-2021 winter storm season have brought their own unique challenges to the blood community in the form of significant disruption to the blood supply. With tens of thousands of blood drives canceled across the country, blood centers quickly transitioned their operations to ensure a sufficient blood supply. In addition, blood centers implemented extraordinary public health measures to protect the safety of both donors and staff, including social distancing, increased infection control procedures, and the acquisition of personal protection equipment (PPE) for staff. In addition to ensuring an available blood supply, blood centers also mobilized quickly to collect COVID-19 convalescent plasma, one of the few therapeutics available for patients fighting the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Over the past year, support from multiple offices with the Department of Health and Human Services has been critical in raising public awareness to the need for blood donors and to ensure inclusion of the blood supply in disaster preparedness and pandemic response. We hope you will continue to work with the blood community to serve as a trusted source of information to the public. In addition, the CARES Act called for a public-private public awareness campaign surrounding blood donation that has yet to be implemented. ABC and our member blood centers stand ready to serve as a resource in this initiative.

We respectfully request an opportunity to meet to discuss these and other pressing issues to the blood supply. Please direct any follow up and/or questions to Diane Calmus, Senior Director, Federal Government Affairs at [dcalmus@americasblood.org](mailto:dcalmus@americasblood.org).

We sincerely look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Kate Fry, MBA, CAE  
Chief Executive Officer