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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3807

October 9, 2002

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson

I am writing to respectfully inform you of my deep disappointment regarding your department's apparent attempt to remove from first responders the ability to use hand held field testing technology for the early detection of biological threat agents. I am informed that HHS has posted bulletins that have effectively intimidated some first responders from using proven and effective field testing technology. This proven rapid detection equipment, such as has been used by the U.S. Capital Police in managing the Anthrax letters sent to Congress, is an important screening tool for first responders and has saved lives.

I can well understand the impractical desire of persons in your department to bring all testing into their laboratories and under their control. What I cannot understand is why you are allowing this to occur even while this policy is being protested by professional and highly competent first responders such as fire chiefs, police chiefs and members of the Federal Inter-Agency Board (IAB).

This heavy handed and top-down approach to protecting the safety of the American public from the threat of future bio-terrorist activities is, in my experience, ill advised. I request that your office immediately rescind this advisory. Subsequently, I would hope that your office would confer with representatives of the first responders to develop a sensible and coordinated approach to this issue, an action that should have occurred at the outset of this process. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Curt Weldon".

CURT WELDON
Member of Congress