

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Administrator Power:

I am writing to express continued concern about the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) work to identify zoonotic disease threats, including through the award of funds under CN #148 (April 2021) for Discovery & Exploration of Emerging Pathogens – Viral Zoonoses (DEEP VZN). While I appreciate the agency's continued engagement on this matter, I remain unconvinced that this work constitutes an effective use of U.S. foreign assistance funding and therefore, cannot clear on my hold.

USAID has been working to address serious concerns raised by my office and others about the proposed use of funds under CN #148 (April 2021) for more than two years – including during briefings with staff on October 26 and December 10, 2021; February 22, 2022; and January 12 and March 27, 2023; and, in response to my written inquiries dated November 23, 2021, and February 2, 2022. Recent efforts to address serious lapses in USAID's management of the \$208 million PREDICT program (2009-2019) by incorporating more stringent safeguards into the award for PREDICT's proposed successor, DEEP VZN, are noted and appreciated.

Still, I remain deeply concerned that USAID does not yet exercise the level of oversight and control over its prime and sub-prime implementing partners that life sciences research of dual use concern surely requires. Even if that level of control could be attained over the coming days, weeks, months, or years – which is highly unlikely – I remain unconvinced that hunting novel viruses would or should ever fall within the core competency of the U.S. government's lead development agency.

Simply put, I cannot support a decision by USAID to move forward with field work or make any further investment in DEEP VZN under CN #148 as currently designed, even with the enhanced safeguards described in your letter and accompanying slides on April 24, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Risch".

JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member