

California Department of Public Health
concerned CA State Public Health Laboratory Staff
850 Marina Bay Parkway,
Richmond CA, 94804

July 26, 2013

Dr. Ron Chapman,
MD, MPH, Director and State Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
PO Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377

Dear Doctor Chapman:

In the last 5 to 7 years the Microbial Diseases Laboratory has faced unprecedented stagnation and cuts in state funding leading to the following critical situations:

- (1) The severe erosion of experienced, high-quality technical personnel since 2005 (through a combination of retirements, transfers, and staff leaving for better paying positions in the private sector) has led to a decline in laboratory diagnostic services and the ability to bring new, innovative services online. This has been compounded by the ongoing inability to hire new staff, resulting in our client laboratories looking elsewhere for reference services. The loss of important reference testing services includes closing of the serology unit in 2006 and mycology unit in 2009. Reference services provided by both the parasitology and biologics units have also been drastically reduced.
- (2) The addition of new services in some sections has not been offset with an increase in support personnel (inability to fill general fund positions). This again has resulted in current staff being stretched to their technical limit (capacity) and beyond, resulting in severe low morale issues.
- (3) Declining morale due to increasingly heavy workloads, limited staffing, poor pay for performance and a loss of trust in professional State leadership has led to an untenable situation. State Public Health Microbiologists (PHMs) are paid less than both local public health microbiologists and those in private sector agencies. (See attached presentation on differential pay). Public Health Microbiologist and Research Scientist civil service lists have few competent names because of the above-described pay discrepancies making it increasingly difficult to replace skilled positions with competent new hires.

(a) Lack of adequate salaries has hampered not only recruitment of highly qualified personnel, but also the ability to retain staff even when hiring is permitted. Every microbiologist (all aged mid-40s or less) hired into state MDL position since 2005 has subsequently left the MDL for better paying jobs. Microbiologists in a **reference laboratory such as the MDL** must have extensive experience and knowledge. Currently among the 26 state funded PHMs in the MDL only four people are under age of 50.

(b) Because of the present situation the MDL lacks the capability for succession planning particularly for Supervisor and Public Health Microbiologist Specialist positions.

(4) The laboratory is faced daily with the inability to purchase necessary reagents and supplies in a timely manner, if at all. This also has led to morale issues as the staff does not believe that the leadership in Sacramento supports the laboratories and their efforts to provide MDL clients (taxpayers) with quality services including, but not limited to:

- (a) Use of phenotypic and molecular methods to identify unusual agents of infection that cannot be identified by client laboratories.
- (b) Epidemiological testing methods to identify outbreak agents and support State Epidemiologists in their duties.
- (c) Testing for agents of bioterrorism.

We respectfully ask that you share this memo and our concerns with the appropriate leadership in Sacramento. Thank you for supporting us and our concerns for the future of the MDL.

Sincerely:

Enclosures: Signatures page 3, Salary Comparison page 4

cc. Dr. Paul Kimsey Ph.D.
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Signed and Submitted by 33 State Scientists