



# ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

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March 22, 2018

The Honorable Jon Tester  
311 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-2604

Senator Tester:

I write on behalf of the Montana Legislature's Environmental Quality Council to ask you to include funding for capital improvements in S. 2252, the Chronic Wasting Disease Support for States Act. This would afford Montana the opportunity to replace the old and antiquated Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (VDL) located on the MSU-Bozeman campus.

The VDL is unable to conduct Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) testing. With recent confirmation of the presence of CWD in deer populations in two Montana counties, an in-state testing facility would be invaluable. Currently, Montana sends its CWD tests to an out-of-state lab, which is not required to prioritize those samples in its testing queue. This has delayed results for up to three weeks.

The 2017 Montana Legislature passed House Bill 661 (enclosed) to study, in part, the long-term future of the VDL and its capabilities. The study subcommittee finds a new facility that meets the accreditation standards of the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians and the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) is needed.

The current facility has several deficiencies that could hinder accreditation and the VDL's ability to conduct a wide array of tests beyond CWD. The value of the VDL to human, domestic, livestock, and wildlife health is paramount. There are several reasons to add capital funding to S. 2252, including:

- There are only 17 NAHLN labs nationwide able to test and confirm CWD.
- CWD is reported in at least 22 states and two Canadian provinces.
- There is potential for free-ranging deer, elk, and moose from bordering states and provinces that experience higher levels of CWD to further infect Montana's herds and put our wildlife at risk.

The money invested in S. 2252 also would allow for identification of and research into causes and prevention of CWD. A federal investment in basic research and infrastructure is an investment in the health and economic future of our nation. Please make public and animal health research a higher priority for our nation by investing in the infrastructure necessary to address CWD.

Senator Tester, thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Senator Chas Vincent, Chair

CC: Senator Steve Daines  
Congressman Greg Gianforte

Enc. HB 661

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