



# Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

## Senator Mary Jo White Chairman

*Patrick Henderson, Executive Director*

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August 27, 2009

The Honorable Everett James  
Secretary of Health  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor West, Health & Welfare Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17108

Dear Secretary James:

Enclosed please find a copy of a letter I recently sent to Secretary of Environmental Protection John Hanger, urging Secretary Hanger to reverse the decision to discontinue funding for the West Nile virus spraying program. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has announced that spraying will be discontinued in 36 counties, effective August 31<sup>st</sup>.

While I understand that Governor Rendell sought to limit the appropriations he signed into law as part of SB 850, I also note that the Governor said his primary purpose in approving some appropriations was to pay state employees and operate those programs "serving immediate basic health and safety purposes." I suggest that the appropriation for West Nile virus spraying meets this definition of an immediate basic health purpose, and so was particularly disappointed that the Governor chose to approve only a small portion of the funding contained in SB 850. I would appreciate knowing if you or anyone at the Department of Health was consulted on this decision.

It is my opinion that DEP has the ability to identify funding *somewhere* within their agency – be it an inter-fund loan or transfer – that would extend spraying across the entire Commonwealth past the August 31<sup>st</sup> deadline. As the Department of Health's own West Nile Virus Fact Sheet notes, encephalitis cases occur primarily in late summer and early fall. In short, we are in the midst of the biggest threat of West Nile virus to our citizens that we will see this year.

We both recognize that legitimate and significant differences still exist between the General Assembly and the Governor on ending the current budget impasse. However, these differences need to be set aside in this case to ensure that no citizen is exposed to a greater threat from West Nile virus. I urge you, as the Commonwealth's chief public health advocate, to encourage DEP and the Governor to identify an existing source of funding and ensure that collectively, we do all we can to minimize this threat.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Jo White".

Mary Jo White, Chairman  
Senate Environmental Resources  
& Energy Committee

Enclosure