TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE HEALTH POLICY

AND AGRICULTURE COMMITTEES

AVIAN INFLUENZA PREPAREDNESS

FEBRUARY 6, 2006

GOOD MORNING CHAIRMEN NITZ AND GAFFNEY AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEES. MY NAME IS KEVIN LOKAR, MD, MPH AND I AM MEDICAL DIRECTOR OF THE MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE COMMENTS RELATED TO AVIAN INFLUENZA PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES IN MICHIGAN AND MACOMB COUNTY.

SERIOUS OUTBREAKS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA A (H5NI) HAVE OCCURED AMONG BIRDS IN ASIA WITH CASES NOW BEING REPORTED IN PARTS OF EUROPE. ALTHOUGH THE H5NI VIRUS IS HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS AMONG BIRDS, IT IS CURRENTLY RARE IN HUMANS DUE TO A SIGNIFICANT SPECIES BARRIER. HOWEVER, RECENT EVIDENCE THAT THE 1918 "SPANISH" FLU WAS CAUSED BY AN AVIAN INFLUENZA VIRUS LENDS CREDENCE TO THE THEORY

THAT THE H5NI VIRUS COULD MUTATE AND LEAD TO A HUMAN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC.

IN THE EVENT OF AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC, LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS IN MICHIGAN WOULD BE CALLED UPON TO PERFORM A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT RESPONSE ACTIVITIES. THESE ACTIVITIES WOULD INCLUDE DISEASE SURVEILLANCE, VACCINE ADMINISTRATION TO LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE, THE DISPENSING OF ANTI-VIRAL MEDICATION, AND THE COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODULAR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SYSTEM (MEMS). THIS SYSTEM WOULD BE NEEDED TO EXPAND THE CAPACITY OF THE HEALTHCARE DELIVERY SYSTEM SO THAT IT COULD HANDLE THE LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE THAT WOULD BECOME ILL AND REQUIRE MEDICAL CARE.

PLANNING TO CARRY OUT THESE ACTIVITIES HAS BEEN ONGOING FOR SEVERAL YEARS AT STATE, LOCAL, AND REGIONAL LEVELS AS PART OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING AND HAS INVOLVED HOSPITALS, LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS,

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENTS, EMS AGENCIES, AND OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A FEW POINTS RELATED TO THESE PLANNING ACTIVITIES THAT I BELIEVE ARE IMPORTANT.

FIRST, THERE CONTINUE TO BE ISSUES RELATED TO LIABILITY, WORKERS COMPENSATION, FACILITY LICENSURE, AND REIMBURSEMENT THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED BEFORE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS CAN BE FINALIZED. THESE ISSUES ARE OF PARTICULAR CONCERN WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODULAR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SYSTEM (MEMS) MODEL. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE STATE LEGISLATURE WORK WITH THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH TO ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS.

SECOND, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS HAVE THE ONGOING CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO AN EMERGENCY SUCH AS AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC. ANY FUNDING DIRECTED TO LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS SHOULD BE INTENDED TO BUILD

AND MAINTAIN THE LEVEL OF INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDED TO RESPOND TO ALL TYPES OF PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES NOT ONLY PANDEMIC INFLUENZA.

THIRD, WHILE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING TO CONTINUE AT A REGIONAL LEVEL, IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND THAT EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACTIVITIES WILL OCCUR AT THE COUNTY OR LOCAL LEVEL AND THAT THE TRADITIONAL ROLES OF COUNTIES AND COUNTY AGENCIES NEED TO BE MAINTAINED.

AGAIN, THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE THIS TESTIMONY.