

JAMES R. LANGEVIN
2D DISTRICT, RHODE ISLAND

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3902

The Honorable James R. Langevin

**Chairman, Homeland Security Subcommittee on
Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity and Science and Technology**

**Opening Statement – Markup of H.R. 1717 to Authorize a National
Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility**

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WASHINGTON OFFICE:
109 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-2735
FAX: (202) 225-5976

DISTRICT OFFICE:
THE SUMMIT SOUTH
300 CENTERVILLE ROAD, SUITE 200
WARWICK, RI 02886
TELEPHONE: (401) 732-9400
FAX: (401) 737-2982

james.langevin@mail.house.gov
www.house.gov/langevin

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology.

Today the subcommittee will mark up H.R. 1717, a bill introduced by my colleague, Ranking Member McCaul, to authorize the proposed National Bio-and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). I am proud to cosponsor this legislation, which has many other notable cosponsors including Mr. Etheridge and Chairman Thompson.

We are all well aware that biological threats – both manmade and naturally occurring – present a real danger to the security of the United States. To defend against such threats, we must promote scientific and technological advances to help us better understand how diseases are transmitted, as well as develop countermeasures to mitigate outbreaks.

For over 50 years, the Plum Island Animal Disease Center has served this nation as a key research facility for foreign animal diseases. That facility is now over half a century old, and experts agree that an upgraded facility is necessary. Current law, which dates back to 1948, requires that live foot and mouth disease virus be studied on an island to protect against an outbreak on the U.S. mainland. Plum Island has been one of many animal disease research centers run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and it fulfilled a unique function partly due to its location off the U.S. mainland.

In the hearing preceding this markup, the witnesses from DHS and USDA all believed that current containment technology is safe enough for this virus to be studied on the U.S. mainland within the confines of a proper facility.

Authorizing a National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility will significantly enhance our ability to study a broad range of zoonotic diseases and will advance our capability to produce effective countermeasures. In addition, H.R. 1717 will allow the Department to acquire or receive by donation property and other services to defray the cost of the facility. I believe that this new and secure facility will improve our knowledge of, and ability to mitigate against, zoonotic diseases, while maintaining our commitment to safety.

The committee has been talking to our colleagues in the Committee on Agriculture, members of DHS and USDA, and several professional organizations regarding the bill language. I think that we are in a good place today to move forward in marking up this important piece of legislation, and we will continue to work with our colleagues on committees with shared jurisdiction as we proceed.

I would again like to commend my colleague, Ranking Member McCaul, for his leadership on this issue. This markup is just the first step in the process, but it is my hope that we will move this bill forward in order to establish the NBAF in statute.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.