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September 22, 2009

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CARDIN SAYS SECURITY AND OVERSIGHT AT BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH LABS SHOULD BE INCREASED, COMMENSURATE WITH RISKS

Washington, DC – **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), chairman of the Judiciary Terrorism and Homeland Security Subcommittee**, today called on the key agencies responsible for security and oversight at America's biological research laboratories to develop a more centralized structure within the executive branch to strengthen security and enhance record keeping. Cardin made his remarks while chairing a subcommittee hearing entitled "Strengthening Security and Oversight at Biological Research Laboratories."

"Congress and the American public need confidence that all legal steps are being taken to protect local communities and to keep dangerous materials out of the hands of terrorists. High-containment laboratories, at places like Fort Detrick and around the country, play a critical role in America's biodefense effort, and require a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors, military and civilian communities, as well as our international partners. At the same time, increasing the number of personnel and laboratories with access to these deadly agents may increase the chances of accidental or malicious use of hazardous materials, posing a significant public health threat through terrorism or other means. The government must concentrate its efforts on the most dangerous of these threats and heighten its security precautions accordingly.

"Just last month, the Army broke ground on a new \$680 million headquarters building for U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID). The laboratory will conduct research on the most deadly pathogens known to humankind, including anthrax, the plague, and the Ebola virus. I know that our Fort Detrick employees also have been working to help the government to combat swine flu and the West Nile virus, among others. This new lab, which will address the most cutting-edge research on dangerous biological organisms, will be housed in one of the nation's highest possible biosafety levels. This precaution is being used to protect the workers at Ft. Detrick and the surrounding community of Frederick, Maryland.

"Since 2001, biological attacks in the United States have resulted in deaths and have sickened dozens of individuals. The federal government responded with increased funding for biodefense and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. But questions still remain as to whether we truly are learning from best practices in government and the private sector to maximize our physical security and personnel reliability. For example, the depth of

background checks has to be commensurate with the seriousness of the biological materials being studied. Disparate agencies across our government must be better coordinated to

protect public safety. Strengthening and improving our security at these research laboratories to protect their contents and the surrounding communities, while not unduly chilling innovation, research, and collaboration, should be our highest priority.”

Testifying today before Senator Cardin’s subcommittee were the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Department of Homeland Security (DHS); Department of Defense (DOD); Government Accountability Office (GAO); as well as former Senator Bob Graham, who chairs the Commission for the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Proliferation and Terrorism; and Michael Greenberger, Director of the Center for Health and Homeland Security at the University of Maryland in Baltimore.

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