



February 4, 2020

The Honorable Rudy Salas
State Capitol, Room 4016
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1966 (Salas) – Gene Synthesis Security – **SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Salas:

We at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security are pleased to support Assembly Bill (AB) 1966, which would address major biosecurity concerns within the gene synthesis industry by making California the first state in the nation to create and implement mandatory public safety screening guidelines for gene synthesis companies.

According to a 2018 report from the National Academies of Sciences, the synthesis of known pathogens, particularly small viruses, is one of the most pressing biodefense risks in the country. While gene synthesis is vital for biomedical research in the California, there are biosecurity concerns associated with the industry. Scientists have demonstrated that it is possible to construct deadly diseases like Ebola by using bits of DNA that can be ordered through the internet from gene synthesis companies.

Currently, no regulations require gene synthesis companies in California to screen their customers or their DNA orders to ensure that they are not purchasing sequences that could be assembled into a potential pathogen. Without a regulatory framework and mandatory screening guidelines for gene synthesis companies, the state's biosecurity is vulnerable to bad actors who could assemble pathogens to harm innocent Californians.

We strongly support AB 1966 because it would strengthen California's biosecurity by requiring that gene synthesis companies screen their customers and their orders to prevent against potential misuse from nefarious actors who would seek to harm our state.

Sincerely,

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