

September 7, 2003

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor-Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The 151 undersigned organizations are concerned about efforts to undermine the merit review system that has been a critical factor in the success of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Should the issue arise, we urge you to oppose efforts during debate on the FY 2004 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriation to cancel funding for specific NIH-funded research grants that already have been approved through the NIH's rigorous merit review process.

NIH's scientific merit review system is the best that has been developed. It ensures that the research to be funded is of the highest scientific and technical merit. Each application goes through review by panels of scientists who have expertise in the research areas covered by the application. Applications are reviewed for the overall impact the research could have on the field, including the study's significance, approach, innovation, investigator's credentials and facilities.

Congressional oversight of the merit review process is an important element in preserving the integrity and success of this nation's medical research effort. However, we firmly believe that oversight should not extend to making funding decisions regarding individual grants. If Congress sets about to micromanage individual NIH grants, it would set a dangerous precedent that would have a chilling impact on medical research and threaten to politicize research – which could impair NIH's ability to continue to make the scientific progress on which our future health depends.

We deeply appreciate your continued support for the National Institutes of Health.

Sincerely,

AIDS ACTION
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
AIDS Project Los Angeles
The Alan Guttmacher Institute
Alpha-1 Association

Alpha-1 Foundation
Ambulatory Pediatric Association
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases
American Association of Anatomists
American Association of Immunologists
American Association of University Professors
American College of Neuropsychopharmacology
American College of Nurse-Midwives
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Educational Research Association
American Federation for Medical Research
American Foundation for AIDS Research
American Gastroenterological Association
American Heart Association
American Liver Foundation
American Neurological Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Parkinson Disease Association
American Pediatric Society
American Peptide Society
American Physiological Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychological Society
American Public Health Association
American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Pharmacology & Experimental Therapeutics
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Clinical Oncology
American Society of Human Genetics
American Society of Nephrology
American Sociological Association
American Thoracic Society
Arthritis Foundation
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of Academic Health Centers
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
Association of Departments of Family Medicine
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Minority Health Professions Schools
Association of Population Centers

Association of Professors of Medicine
Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Association of Schools of Public Health
Association of Subspecialty Professors
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Boston University School of Medicine
Cedars-Sinai Health System
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Center for the Advancement of Health
The Children's Hospital Research Institute
Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine
College on Problems of Drug Dependence
Columbia Health Sciences
Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Cooley's Anemia Foundation
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA
Dartmouth Medical School
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Duke University Medical Center
The Endocrine Society
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences
Gay & Lesbian Medical Association
Gay Men's Health Crisis
The Genetics Society of America
The Genome Action Coalition
The Gerontological Society of America
Harvard University
Health GAP (Global Access Project)
Hepatitis Foundation International
HIV Medicine Association
Immune Deficiency Foundation
Indiana University School of Medicine
Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research
Lymphoma Research Foundation
Medical College of Wisconsin
Medical Dermatology Society
Michigan State University
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Biomedical Research
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges
National Association of Veterans Research And Education Foundations

National Caucus of Basic Biomedical Science Chairs
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Health Council
National Marfan Foundation
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Partnership for Women and Families
National Women's Health Network
NephCure Foundation
New York University School of Medicine
North American Primary Care Research Group
Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine
The Ohio State University Medical Center
Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation
Parkland Health and Hospital System
Pennsylvania Society for Biomedical Research
The Pennsylvania State University
Population Association of America
The Protein Society
Pulmonary Hypertension Association
Reproductive Health Technologies Project
Research!America
Society for Adolescent Medicine
Society for Gynecologic Investigation
Society for Neuroscience
Society for Pediatric Research
Society for Research in Child Development
The Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality
Society for the Study of Reproduction
Society for Women's Health Research
Society of Teachers of Family Medicine
Stanford University School of Medicine
Texas A&M University System Health Science Center
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance
University of California
University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine
University of Chicago
University of Cincinnati College of Medicine
University of Florida
University of Illinois
University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville School of Medicine
University of Minnesota Academic Health Center
University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
University of North Carolina at Wilmington
University of Pittsburgh
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
The University of Washington
Washington University in St. Louis
Wright State University School of Medicine