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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

September 22, 2026

The Honorable Russ Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

The Honorable Jay Bhattacharya
Director
National Institutes of Health
Building 1
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Director Vought and Director Bhattacharya:

I write regarding recent reports that the administration is preparing an executive order that would add a layer of political review of National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant applications after the merit-review process. This proposal appears similar to a provision included in an Office of Management and Budget proposed rule to revise the Uniform Guidance – a provision that Congress blocked as part of the Fiscal Year 2027 Continuing Resolution. I urge you not to move forward with this proposal, which would undermine the intent of the CR provision and more important, the Federal government's objective of funding biomedical research projects based on scientific merit and value rather than political ideology.

The United States leads the world in biomedical innovation and research. Investments in Alzheimer's, Type 1 Diabetes (T1D), and cancer have resulted in new therapies and diagnostics to treat these – and so many other diseases. Recent advances in Alzheimer's research, supported by years of strong investment by Congress, are enabling identification of Alzheimer's at early stages, when interventions are most likely to be effective. Federal investments are also helping to spur exciting new advancements to treat patients with T1D, including FDA approval of the first-ever stem cell treatment for T1D. One year after receiving this treatment, ten out of the twelve patients in the clinical trial no longer need insulin.

Your proposal to establish a new committee to review NIH grants risks undermining the Congressionally-mandated peer review process that all NIH grants must undergo before they are approved for federal funding (42 U.S.C. §289a). Every application for NIH funding undergoes a long and demanding review process that includes committees of outside experts who review the applications and evaluate them based on merit. In addition, Director Bhattacharya has worked to prioritize innovation so that NIH is funding meritorious applications focused on cutting-edge science that will ultimately result in cures for rare and chronic diseases as well as better treatments to improve American lives.

The rigor of the peer review process is key to NIH's success and has contributed to 174 scientists either at NIH, or whose research is supported by NIH funds, becoming the sole or shared recipients of 104 Nobel Prizes.

The last major reforms of NIH were signed into law in 2016 through the 21st Century Cures Act. If the administration seeks additional reforms of NIH, I urge you to submit a legislative proposal to Congress rather than pursue an executive order.

Thank you for consideration of these important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan M. Collins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator