June 30, 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
and Related Agencies
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
and Related Agencies
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As members of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, we urge you to protect the nation’s research and innovation enterprise. The president’s Fiscal Year 2018 budget request for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) includes a proposal to cap facilities and administrative (F&A) reimbursements for research grants at 10 percent of the total grant. This cap would result in devastating funding cuts to research universities and colleges across the country and risk our leadership in science. We recommend you include language in the FY18 appropriations bill prohibiting this unilateral change to research management.

Since World War II, the federal government has played a major role in funding early-stage research and development. Recognizing the capacity of universities, the government developed a model to share in the costs of conducting research, and since that time, our universities and colleges have been the cornerstone of the nation’s research activities. These investments have provided significant returns by creating and advancing major industries like computing, aerospace, and biotechnology. In fact, as much as half of the economic growth in the United States over the last 50 years is attributable to advances and innovations in science and technology. Moreover, research activities at universities help educate and train our next generation of scientists, inventors, and innovators.

The costs to maintain research infrastructure, which are shared between the universities and the federal government, are significant. Without the cost sharing model currently in place, we will lose the ability to conduct research in this country at the current scale. The United States is already losing the competitive advantage that has made us the most powerful economy in the world, and such drastic cuts to our research infrastructure will be impossible to overcome. In fact, Congress should increase investments in maintaining and building modern research infrastructure in order to drive economic growth, security, and our leadership in science.
Last year, our committee advanced bipartisan legislation, the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act (P.L. 114-329), to improve our nation’s research system and ensure we remain leaders in innovation. This bill was later passed unanimously in the Senate and House. Among other things, this legislation requires the executive branch to reduce the regulatory and reporting burden on academic researchers. We believe that thoughtful reforms in managing federally-funded research will help save costs and improve the efficiency of research. We would urge the committee to continue to support these efforts rather than drastically slash our investment in research, infrastructure, and administration.

Federal investment in research is already at a historic low of barely over three quarters of a percentage point of our gross domestic product. If we want to keep America at the forefront of innovation, Congress must come together to strengthen our commitment to scientific research. We urge you to continue the subcommittee’s bipartisan support for science and reject proposals that will devastate research at universities and colleges across the nation.

Sincerely,

BILL NELSON
Ranking Member

EDWARD J. MARKEY
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Space, Science, and Competitiveness

GARY PETERS
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard

TAMMY BALDWIN
Member