July 30, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker  
United States of House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner:

We the undersigned national organizations and research institutions are writing to express our concerns regarding several provisions in the Fiscal Year 2013 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Act that micromanage the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in addition to freezing its budget; thus limiting the agency’s ability to support the most promising, scientifically-driven research. Specifically, we are opposed to language in the bill that prohibits the NIH to use funds “for any economic research programs, projects or activities.”

As you know, the NIH mission is to support scientifically rigorous, peer-reviewed research, including basic and applied behavioral and social science research. Economic research, specifically research on the linkages between socioeconomic status and health outcomes in the elderly and achievement and health outcomes in children, has been an integral part of the interdisciplinary science NIH has supported historically. The agency’s investment has yielded key data, methodologies and substantive insights on some of the most important and pressing issues facing the U.S.

For example:

- NIH funded surveys such as the Health and Retirement Survey, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, parts of the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experiences, and surveys on International Aging and retirement provide data necessary to monitor and detect changes in important socioeconomic trends in health.

- Economic modeling and methodologies and the longitudinal data from these surveys enable researchers to disentangle cause from effect and measure the relative significance of the different socioeconomic and environmental determinants of health related trends.

- Results of NIH funded economic research provide insights into important topics such as the functioning of the health care system, design and effects of health insurance and financing, diffusion of new health technologies, cost analysis and projections of health care, retirement date, savings, wealth accumulation and assets, and health-employment nexus and relationship.
NIH support of economics is also playing a key role in nurturing new fields of research such as the economics of aging, neuroeconomics and behavioral economics. Other agencies, including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Social Security Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Administration on Aging, rely on the NIH to review, fund, and disseminate research findings that these agencies can translate into informed policy and programmatic decisions.

As the bill moves forward, we urge the Committee to reconsider the implications of this language and remove it from the final funding package whether the bill moves independently or is made part of a larger spending measure.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

AcademyHealth
Academy of Radiology Research
Alliance for Aging Research
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Association of Anatomists
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Economic Association
American Educational Research Association
American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR)
American Heart Association
American Physiological Society
American Political Science Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychosomatic Society
American Society of Clinical Oncology
American Society of Nephrology (ASN)
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
American Thoracic Society
Association for Psychological Science
Association of American Geographers
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Population Centers
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Biophysical Society
Brown University
California Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors (CAADAC)
ChangeLab Solutions
Coalition for Imaging and Bioengineering Research
Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (CAHT-BSSR)
Coalition to Promote Research (CPR)
Columbia University Medical Center
Connecticut Commission on Health Equity
Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council of Graduate Schools
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Council on Social Work Education
Duke University
Duke University School of Medicine
Economic History Association
Emerald Logic
Emory University
Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences
Fight Colorectal Cancer
Global Alliance for the Prevention of Prematurity and Stillbirth
Harvard University
Indiana University
International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC)
Law and Society Association
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Mental Health America

The Consortium of Social Science Associations
Michigan State University
Midwest Political Science Association
NABE (National Association of Business Economics)
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR)
National Association of Social Workers
North Carolina State University
Northeastern University
NYU Langone Medical Center
Population Association of America
Research!America
Saint Louis University
Social Science History Association
Society for Research in Child Development
Society for Women's Health Research
Society of Government Economists
Stanford University
The Gerontological Society of America
The Ohio State University
The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Tulane University
University of California, San Francisco
University of Connecticut Health Center
University of Maryland
University of Michigan
University of Rochester
University of Southern California
University of Vermont
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Vanderbilt University

The Consortium of Social Science Associations