July 23, 2015

The Honorable Brian Schatz  The Honorable Chris Coons  
United States Senate  United States Senate  
Hart Senate Office Building, SH-722  Russell Senate Office Building, SR-127A  
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510  

Dear Senators:

On behalf 14 scientific, engineering, and defense industry organizations, we write to urge you to support modifications to a provision in the FY 2016 Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill stating that “none of the funds made available in this or any other appropriations Act may be used for travel and conference activities that are not in compliance with Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M–12–12 dated May 11, 2012.” We request that the language maintain consistency with Sec. 535(e) of the FY 2016 Senate Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies appropriations bill, by including the phrase “or any subsequent revisions to that memorandum.” after the date in reference to the OMB memo. This will allow OMB to implement a more appropriate review mechanism.

While reasonable safeguards should be in place to ensure that taxpayer funds are not used for frivolous expenditures, evidence is mounting that the current framework of conference travel restrictions is having a strong negative impact on federally funded scientific research and the ability of our federally funded researchers to participate in STEM exhibitions and events that inspire, engage and provide mentorship for our next generation of great scientists. Furthermore, data gathered by the Government Accountability Office and National Science and Technology Council have demonstrated that agencies are spending large sums of taxpayer dollars to comply with current, burdensome restrictions.

In light of this information, it is clear that changes need to be made to agency policy, and this minor modification will allow changes to proceed. Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you on this and other important issues before the committee.

Sincerely,

American Chemical Society
American Geophysical Union
American Helicopter Society International
American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics
American Statistical Association
The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
Council of Scientific Society Presidents
Entomological Society of America
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
IEEE-USA
Research!America
Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering-North America
The Optical Society
SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics