April 23, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your leadership in securing critical research funding for the development of treatments and a vaccine for the coronavirus. We are concerned about the state of non-coronavirus research and the research workforce that has been idled due to closed laboratories and severely limited research activities. We respectfully request that the next coronavirus relief package include $26 billion in supplemental appropriations for the major research agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Department of Defense Science and Technology Programs, to fund a four-month cost extension of federal grants.

Like most businesses across the country, research labs have experienced closures, slowdowns, and harm to their workforce and capabilities. While some research labs are repurposing their efforts for the COVID-19 fight or attempting to telework, many others have seen their federally funded research delayed, halted, or interrupted. This translates to holes in critical data collection, the loss of work and pay for staff scientists and other technical workers, graduate students unable to complete their degrees, and the need for extended post-doctoral work. It also means that groundbreaking and often life-saving research will inevitably suffer.

For example, the University of California, San Francisco, is working with 80 universities and sites on the Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) NIH initiative, which supports longitudinal studies to identify and intervene in factors that lead to preterm birth, obesity, asthma, and neurodevelopmental outcomes. ECHO is dependent on recruiting pregnant women and following their children. Understandably, much of this work, including collecting valuable information and specimen samples, and recruiting new participants, has had to stop.

Similarly, investigators at Stanford University involved in the multisite NIH Alzheimer Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) have ceased their collection of critical measurements of brain and biology in affected and unaffected people due to the vulnerability of the elderly adults who participate in these studies at sixty sites across the country. Many NIH clinical trials for non-life threatening disorders have also been suspended, particularly those with immunocompromised participants.

As such, we request $26 billion in supplemental appropriations to provide a four-month cost extension for extramural research. This federal investment is needed to sustain our research enterprise, and to make up for the anticipated losses in investments by states and industry due to
decreased revenues. Institutions should be able to apply to the agencies that awarded their grants or contracts for relief funds to cover the cost of shortfalls in personnel and other operating costs. Specifically, the funding will be used to cover requests for research grant and contract supplements (i.e., cost extensions) due to COVID-19 related impacts, including salary support; for emergency relief to sustain research support personnel and base operating costs for core research facilities and user-funded research services; and to fund additional graduate student and postdoc fellowships, traineeships, and research assistantships.

Our research workforce – graduate students, postdocs, principal investigators, technical support staff, among others – represents the best of American ingenuity and will be essential in ensuring our public health, financial wellbeing, and national security. For the sake of future developments and cures in the fight against cancer, chronic diseases, and pandemics, it is needed for the federal government to step in and sustain this critical work.

Sincerely,

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

David E. Price
David N. Cicilline
Daniel W. Lipinski
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Sheila Jackson Lee
Danny K. Davis
Suzan DelBene
Rick Larsen
G. K. Butterfield
Jimmy Panetta
John Garamendi
Eric Swalwell
James P. McGovern
Bobby L. Rush
Debbie Dingell