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Dear Congressman:

We are writing on behalf of the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research, a scientific society dedicated to advancing research at the interface of Medicine and the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Membership in the academy is restricted to a small number of leaders who are elected on the basis of exceptional scientific contribution, or important contributions through senior public or private sector leadership. Thus the academy represents the intellectual leaders in our field.

We view with deep concern recent efforts to censor NIH-approved grants to researchers, because these grants might concern topics, diseases, and/or behaviors, which are unpalatable to certain political and religious groups.

NIH has historically been a remarkably effective vehicle for evaluating the scientific merit and importance of all applications for research that will further the mission of the NIH to provide for the health and well being of all Americans. The NIH peer review system winnows down the applications to assure that only the most meritorious receive funding. The current system has evolved to include safeguards against scientific bias and conflicts of interest, as well as frivolity.

Various groups have criticized the peer review system and suggested that Congress intervene to block studies on topics such as human sexuality and drug abuse. Such an intervention would be misguided for three reasons:

1. They confuse “studying” a phenomenon with “approving” a phenomenon. Drug abuse, for instance, has a devastating effect in every corner of our society. Unless we study matters such as usage patterns and experimental treatments, we are condemned to ignorance and passivity in the face of this profoundly threatening behavior with all of its associated societal and medical consequences. Similarly, even though topics related to sexual expression and sexual behaviors evoke strong feelings, research is not the same thing as advocacy. That is, studying promiscuous sexual behavior with all of its attendant risks is not an effort to advocate for such behaviors but to discover the most effective ways for changing these destructive behaviors.
2. They discredit the existing NIH review system, which has been highly effective in evaluating research applications.
3. They force Congress into a micro-managing mode when Congress has vitally important other matters to deal with.

We hope you will oppose such efforts to micromanage the NIH in its decision-making role to foster all biological and psychosocial research in areas relevant to health and healthcare management

Sincerely,

Executive Board, ABMR