



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

July 24, 2009

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), a scientific and professional society with 148,000 scientists, academics, practitioners and students worldwide, I am writing to urge your continued support for scientific integrity during the upcoming House debate on the FY 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill (H.R. 3293). I urge you to vote against the Issa amendment that would eliminate funding for three specific research grants supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This legislative means of attacking specific grants that have already been judged important to the public health gravely undermines scientific confidence in NIH. The NIH merit review process is rigorous and exacting, resulting in the funding of less than one grant out of five received. NIH must support a broad array of basic, pre-clinical research and applied, disease-specific research in order to make steady progress on multiple fronts against numerous conditions and diseases. For Congress to defund any grants that have been approved through NIH's process is a blow to science, to scientists, and ultimately, to public health.

As all three of these grants are projects looking to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in high-risk populations, it is critical to remember the devastating impact that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had on our global health. More than 25 million men, women, and children have already died of this disease and an estimated 33 million people are currently living it. While people are living longer with HIV, prevention of HIV infection remains critical, as an estimated 2.7 million new HIV infections occurred as recently as 2007.

Research is easy to ridicule if it is taken out of its public health context, but prevention of HIV infection is NIH's highest priority for HIV-related research. Scientists need to explore a range of research avenues in vulnerable populations around the world, including female sex workers, injection drug users, women of color, and men who have sex with men, to learn the best ways to control the transmission of HIV. With slow progress being made in the development of effective HIV vaccines and microbicides, the need for additional targeted behavioral approaches is critical.

Biomedical and behavioral interventions are urgently needed to reach individuals at risk both in the U.S. and in international settings. NIH supports research aimed at better understanding and modifying the social and cultural factors associated with HIV infection, particularly in communities at high risk of acquiring HIV. Participation in these types of studies also can provide a way for persons at high risk, or already infected, to receive treatment while contributing to our knowledge of prevention and treatment outcomes in these populations.

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*Executive Director for Science*

Congress has many means at its disposal to help NIH set research priorities and respond to changing circumstances - including the recently empanelled Scientific Management Review Board, mandated in the NIH Reform Act of 2006. Targeting specific grants after they have been funded is the means most destructive to the scientific process and most harmful to NIH's reputation as the leading scientific institution in the world. NIH is flexible and responsive to national concerns and cannot carry out its mission in the face of capricious attacks on its procedures and its supported scientists.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven J. Breckler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven J. Breckler, PhD  
Executive Director for Science