



Statement of Support for Grants Funded Under NIH's Peer Review System

Scientific research funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) must be judged to be of the highest scientific quality before grant awards are made to scientists. NIH's peer review system is rigorous and recognized around the world as the "gold standard" for evaluating quality and relevance in research proposals. The process involves review by independent scientific experts from around the country, as well as review by agency advisory councils which include public representatives.

The interests of the American people are best served by a scientific process that is not subject to political or personal attacks. Recent attacks on three NIH grants that address HIV/AIDS prevention in at-risk populations around the world — despite the quality of the proposals and independent judgment of their merit and contribution to public health — may set back our understanding of the social and cultural contexts of high-risk behaviors in vulnerable populations and ultimately our knowledge about the best ways to control the spread of HIV/AIDS. Likewise, singling out basic research projects that increase our understanding of fundamental principles (e.g., how memory works or how speech develops), without a full understanding of the importance of the research in building a foundation of knowledge that will improve the health of the population, decreases morale in the scientific community and, again, may slow scientific progress. To accomplish its mission of improving the nation's health, the NIH must support all promising areas of science.

The NIH's peer review process has helped to make NIH one of the world's premier scientific institutions. The highly competitive process for reviewing proposals results in only one in five proposals receiving funding — and the percentage of applications supported using ARRA funding is considerably lower. The integrity of the review process is undermined when individual grants are targeted, despite prior judgment by NIH and independent scientists that the projects are significant and relevant to the agency mission.

Congress has an important oversight responsibility, but must ensure that the scientific process critical to advancing the health of the population is protected. FABBS supports NIH's peer review system and its decision to fund research that will advance its mission to improve the public health. We encourage Members of Congress to resist efforts to target specific areas of research or individual grants and to protect the integrity of the peer review process used by our nation's premier institutions.