

January 12, 2021

ASBMB SUPPORTS H.R. 144 – SUPPORTING EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS ACT

The following is a statement from Benjamin Corb, public affairs director for the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology:

“The American research enterprise, like so many segments of the American workforce, has been deeply damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdowns at universities and research labs across the country as individual states and localities take actions to slow the spread of the virus. A bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives this week, [H.R. 144](#), the Supporting Early-Career Researchers Act aims to forestall the loss of research talent as a result of the pandemic by creating temporary fellowships for early-career researchers. The ASBMB strongly endorses this bill, which, if passed, would establish a [\\$250 million postdoctoral fellowship pilot program](#) at the National Science Foundation. This program would sustain early-career researchers throughout the pandemic and prevent a permanent loss of STEM talent.

Early-career researchers are a particularly vulnerable segment of the research workforce. Most of their research training is supported by taxpayer-funded research grants, and the pandemic has made the hypercompetitive funding environment even worse.

Early-career researchers already struggle with limited research funds, intense job competition and career uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges by narrowing the pool of resources and by reducing job opportunities as universities struggle with research output and loss of productivity. The [pandemic has also worsened](#) job prospective as universities across the country have initiated hiring freezes due to budgetary concerns. Without federal support, the American STEM pipeline will lose a generation of young researchers at time when we need more scientific expertise than ever.

Graduate students and postdocs in particular have been hard hit by the effects of the pandemic. Federally funded trainees lost [six months to a year](#) of training in 2020. As a result, they have delayed completion of their education and are experiencing a gap in funding either to complete their education or to get hands-on research experience. Once trainees leave the research enterprise, even if it’s only temporary, it is very difficult for them to [re-enter the STEM workforce](#). This leak in the pipeline is a significant loss to the STEM workforce and a significant waste of already-invested federal dollars.

We applaud this bill and similar efforts to address this issue, and we look forward to working with Congress to see this important legislation pass.”