



July 21, 2025

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Appeal to Defend Civil Service Protections and the Mission of the National Science Foundation

Dear Representative Lofgren:

We, the undersigned members of American Federation of Government Employees Local 3403 (AFGE 3403), who work at the National Science Foundation (NSF), write to you with deep concern over a series of politically motivated and legally questionable actions by the Administration that threaten the integrity of the NSF and undermine the civil service protections guaranteed under federal law.

As civil servants, NSF employees are bound by their oath to uphold the Constitution. That oath now compels us to call attention to actions that jeopardize NSF's mission, its independence, and the foundational laws that protect the federal workforce from politicization and abuse.

The sweeping and sudden termination of hundreds of NSF employees this year, including senior staff and those managing Congressionally mandated programs, was not only damaging to the agency's functioning but appears to violate the letter and spirit of title 5, the body of law establishing the professional, apolitical civil service, and is we would argue an unlawful impoundment of funds appropriated by Congress to advance American scientific research.

The following categories of harm collectively amount to the systemic dismantling of a world-renowned scientific agency:

1. A Proposed Budget Cut That Would Cripple American Science

The Administration's FY2026 request proposes a 56% cut to NSF's budget, more than 70% in biological sciences, engineering, and STEM education. If enacted, it would undermine U.S. leadership in science, eliminate funding for over 250,000 researchers and students, and break bipartisan commitments made under the CHIPS and Science Act.

2. Termination of Active Research Awards Without Transparency or Lawful Justification

Between April and May 2025, over 1,600 active NSF grants were canceled using undisclosed criteria devised by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). This action negates billions of dollars of past investments, violates Congressional intent in legislation such as the America COMPETES Act, and disregards NSF's peer review process.

3. Political Review of Scientific Grants

A covert and ideologically driven secondary review process by unqualified political appointees is now interfering with the scientific merit-based review system. This contradicts the founding vision of NSF as an apolitical agency that values intellectual independence and scientific rigor.

4. Withholding of Appropriated Funds

As of July 2, 2025, some \$2.2 billion of NSF's \$9 billion FY2025 appropriation remained illegally withheld by the Office of Management and Budget, despite being authorized by Public Law 119-4. This not only impairs the agency's operations but violates public law requiring transparency in disbursements (P.L. 117-328).

5. Unlawful Terminations and Threatened Mass Reductions in Force

In February, over 10% of NSF's workforce was terminated. Many of these dismissals lacked due process or legal justification. A federal court ordered reinstatement of some employees, but many experts remain unemployed. Staff in the Division of Equity for Excellence in STEM were recently notified of their terminations despite their legally mandated role.

6. Coerced Resignations and Loss of Expertise

Fear of retaliation, lack of job stability, and abrupt RTO orders have pushed hundreds of seasoned staff into early retirement or resignation. Rotating scholars (IPA employees) are being slashed from 330 to 70 and now face 90-day contracts and logistical chaos, severing vital ties to the broader research community.

7. Unannounced and Unplanned Eviction from Headquarters

On June 25, 2025, NSF employees were informed that the agency would be relocated from its dedicated Alexandria headquarters in 2026 to make way for HUD, without any transparent planning, cost-benefit justification, or identified destination for NSF headquarters. The sudden eviction will be deeply disruptive to NSF operations, morale, and employee retention.

8. NSF's Betrayal of Scientific Integrity Through Politicized Probation Policies

Despite its status as an independent agency, NSF has blatantly violated its 50-year-old Collective Bargaining Agreement with AFGE Local 3403 by retroactively extending probationary periods from one to two years. In response to Trump's April 24, 2025, executive order, NSF unilaterally implemented a vague and arbitrary review process requiring certification that continued employment serves the "public interest" and NSF "organizational goals" ignoring prior service and contractual protections. This politicized misuse of probationary rules undermines scientific integrity, guts merit-based employment, and invites fraud, waste, and abuse—all in service of a broader agenda to dismantle institutional safeguards, impose demagoguery in research funding decisions, and undermine science.

Petition for Action

As provided under the Lloyd-La Follette Act (5 U.S.C. 7211), the signatories respectfully petition the Committee to:

1. **Ensure that NSF employees are shielded from politically motivated firings and protected under merit-based personnel systems.**
2. **End illegal impoundments** of monies appropriated to NSF.
3. **Defend the agency** from further interference in its peer review process.
4. **Demand transparency** from OMB, DOGE, and NSF leadership regarding internal employment policies and future agency relocations.
5. **Reaffirm NSF's scientific independence** and support for world-class research that advances national prosperity and security.

NSF employees are committed to serving the American people through research, education, and innovation. But they cannot do so under fear, censorship, and institutional sabotage. Without immediate oversight and corrective action from Congress, one of our nation's greatest engines for scientific and technological advancement faces irreversible long-term damage. Put simply, America will forfeit its scientific leadership position to China and other rival nations.

Sincerely,

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