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SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH
IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

WENDY A. NAUS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JAMES S. JACKSON, PH.D.
PRESIDENT

March 12, 2014

The Honorable Larry Bucshon
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Research and Technology
Committee on Science, Space and
Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Daniel Lipinski
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research
and Technology
Committee on Science, Space and
Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bucshon and Ranking Member Lipinski:

On behalf of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), I am writing to express deep concern about the *Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science and Technology Act of 2014* (H.R. 4186), or *FIRST Act*, which is being considered by your subcommittee this week. COSSA is an advocacy organization that seeks to bridge the academic research community with Washington policy makers to articulate and promote the importance of federally-funded social and behavioral science research. Our membership includes more than 100 professional associations, scientific societies, universities, and research centers and institutes. Our membership list is enclosed.

COSSA and the broader scientific community object to the *FIRST Act*, which if enacted would decimate federal support for critical programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF) that have proven their value to the U.S. economy, national security, and the health of our citizens. Equally important, the *FIRST Act* as introduced would significantly undermine NSF's merit review process. Of utmost concern throughout the scientific community is that the *FIRST Act* represents a departure from the original goals of the *America COMPETES Act*, which as you know was to revitalize the U.S. scientific enterprise by making critical investments in U.S. science agencies, thereby ensuring our nation's standing as the scientific leader on the global stage.

The *FIRST Act* contains several provisions objectionable to the scientific community. Perhaps the most distressing is the proposed authorization of appropriations for the Social, Behavioral and Economic (SBE) sciences directorate. The more than 40 percent cut to SBE would cause irreparable damage to the U.S. scientific enterprise, the impacts of which would be felt at colleges and universities across the country, including in your districts. Further, such a cut would undermine the U.S.'s ability to answer questions of national importance, such as how to convince a community in the path of a tornado to seek cover, or statistical analyses that help local governments understand crime patterns, among others. Without this science, and without an understanding of the fundamental nature of who we are, policy-making on major national issues cannot be based on evidence and billions of dollars will be wasted.

Consider the breakthroughs that would not have been possible without federal support. For example, research supported by NSF has provided the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) with its current system for apportioning the airwaves via a fruitful, practical application of game theory and experimental economics. Since their inception in 1994, FCC “spectrum auctions” have netted over \$60 billion in revenue for the federal government. The U.S. system of partitioning airwaves is now emulated in several other countries around the world, resulting in total worldwide revenues in excess of \$200 billion.

In addition, researchers at Indiana University, Drexel University, and Arizona State University developed spatial models to help manage the location of sex offenders. Their research addressed concerns regarding the impact of sex offender residency laws on a community, considering important factors such as whether residency restrictions lead to high concentrations of offenders in specific areas, distribute the risk across a community equitably, and keep sex offenders from living near minors. Improving the development and evaluation of sex offender residency policies in advance of any legislation will allow public officials the opportunity to consider the resulting distribution of offenders in terms of local residents, better meeting the needs of communities.

Finally, researchers at Washington University in St. Louis investigated emotion recognition using nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, vocal tones and body language. Based on this research, the Army Research Institute now incorporates education on nonverbal communication into soldier training, thereby assisting troops in understanding cross-cultural, nonverbal communication with non-English speaking citizens with whom they interact overseas. Thus, this research has the potential to provide human solutions in military situations. It has been demonstrated that enhancing troops’ interpersonal skills can enable them to anticipate and diffuse conflict, as well as facilitate cooperation, negotiation and compromise.

The proposed cuts to SBE would translate to projects like these going unsupported. The small annual investment in the social and behavioral sciences, especially as compared to the billions of dollars spent in other fields of science, yields tremendous returns for society.

COSSA hopes you will engage with the scientific community to address the concerns outlined above. We are confident that there is a solution that promotes all fields of science, reduces unnecessary burden for NSF staff and the research community, ensures transparency without duplication of effort, and allows NSF’s merit review process—which is the envy of the world—to continue.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information.

Sincerely,



Wendy A. Naus
COSSA Executive Director

Cc: The Honorable Lamar Smith
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson

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