



Statement on “Scientific Research in the National Interest”

The Federation of Association in Behavioral and Brain Sciences recognizes that Congress has the authority—and responsibility—for building the nation’s scientific infrastructure. In the midst of tight fiscal budgets, the pressure grows to ensure that the American taxpayer’s money is used wisely.

While H.R. 3293, the *Scientific Research in the National Interest* bill, aims to increase accountability and transparency in the awarding of scientific grants at the National Science Foundation (NSF), our community of scientists is concerned about the bill’s impact, especially as it relates to one particular provision.

The bill overall, requires NSF staff to make a determination and provide a written justification that a research grant or cooperative agreement is in the national interest and is worthy of federal funding. The national interest criterion provides details (although not comprehensive) as to how a research grant or cooperative agreement may meet the national interest criterion. While the particular provision may not be needed, the NSF Director has stated that the national interest language aligns with the mission of the agency.

Our particular concern, however, concerns the other major criterion for NSF scientific awards. The bill requires that the agency make a determination that a research grant or cooperative agreement “is worthy of Federal funding.” The bill does not include any details about how this judgment is to be made, and therefore, may be subject to varying interpretations, including between NSF staff and members of Congress. Drawing Congress and the scientific community into debates over research awards will continue to undermine the public’s faith in the institution. It may also produce a chilling effect in the scientific community. This can be prevented.

We urge Congress to support the amendment by Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson that provides clarity on the meaning of the “worthiness” criterion. The amendment specifies that the research grant is deemed worthy if it meets the merit review criteria of the National Science Foundation, the time-honored gold standard of independent scientific review. Doing so will help reduce confusion and concern in the scientific community.

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Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences (FABBS) is a coalition of scientific societies that share an interest in advancing the sciences of mind, brain, and behavior.