



National Science Board

Statement on the Frontiers in Innovation, Science, and Technology Act of 2014 (H.R. 4186)

April 24, 2014

The National Science Board (NSB) appreciates the historic strong commitment of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology to the National Science Foundation (NSF) and to the research that NSF supports. In the face of global challenges to our Nation's scientific leadership, NSF must maintain an unwavering focus on enabling scientific breakthroughs and on supporting the next generation of scientists. These scientists' discoveries will underpin the health of the United States long into the future, especially with respect to its economic growth, prosperity, and security.

However, we are concerned that elements of the *Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST) Act* do not advance those goals. In fact, some of its provisions and tone suggest that Congress intends to impose constraints that would compromise NSF's ability to fulfill its statutory purpose. Some elements of the bill would also impose significant new burdens on scientists that would not be offset by gains to the nation. Our greatest concern is that the bill's specification of budget allocations to each NSF Directorate would significantly impede NSF's flexibility to deploy its funds to support the best ideas in fulfillment of its mission to "*promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense; and for other purposes.*"

The Board agrees that accountability and transparency are foundational to any Federal agency's mission. In the case of NSF's grant-making processes, accountability and transparency can improve both public appreciation of science and the agency's ability to deliver science in the national interest. Toward these ends, NSF management and the National Science Board are implementing new processes that will increase both transparency and accountability. We therefore do not see a need to impose new, more inflexible, legislated requirements on NSF and our science and engineering communities. We are concerned that the proposed new legislative requirements might discourage visionary proposals or transformative science at a time when advancing the decades-long U.S. leadership in science and technology is a top priority.

Since 1950, NSF has delivered enormous value to U.S. taxpayers by relying on rigorous merit review to identify the most promising research ideas across all disciplines. That value is rooted in the passion, integrity, and curiosity of our nation's scientists and engineers who conduct research with high standards of ethical conduct and accountability. Our national competitiveness, defense, and prosperity have always been and will continue to be energized by scientific leadership. Every day our researchers ask breathtaking questions about the world around us, about our genes, our brains, and about society as a whole. They are poised to take the lead in answering many of these questions, even when global collaborations are required. It is critical to our nation's future that U.S. scientists have the freedom and flexibility necessary to pursue those leadership roles effectively.

Generations of scientists, engineers, and public servants have shaped the National Science Foundation into an unsurpassed engine that drives economic competitiveness and national well-being through the progress of science. As stewards of this exceptional agency, which is a role model for the world, the NSB is committed to engage with the Administration and the Congress to ensure scientific progress continues for generations to come.