

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Donna Edwards
Best Practices in Transforming Research into Innovation: Creative Approaches to the Bayh-Dole Act
June 19, 2012

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing on university technology transfer. And thank you to our witnesses for joining us here today to share your perspective on how to get more promising research out of university labs and into the marketplace.

I am very pleased that we are taking a serious look at this issue. I am convinced that there are a number of ways that we can strengthen and improve technology transfer in this country. There are far too many good ideas out there in our universities – good ideas that have been developed through Federal taxpayer support – that languish. And, as we continue to look for ways to strengthen our economy and secure our global competitiveness, I think it would be wise to focus on technology transfer. I am excited to hear from our witnesses today about some innovative approaches to technology transfer and discuss ways that the Federal Government can help facilitate these approaches.

The truth is that there are various elements that contribute to efficient and effective technology transfer.

First, you have to be able to identify research with commercial potential. This can be a significant challenge since researchers are not necessarily equipped to recognize commercial potential and industry has limited exposure to all of the research coming out of universities. At the same time, research may have commercial relevance in a space not initially envisioned by the researcher or recognized by industry. Finding better ways to identify ideas with commercial potential is certainly a challenge, but one that is critical to the entire technology transfer process.

Once you've identified an idea or concept with commercial potential, you have to demonstrate its technical feasibility. This is often accomplished through some sort of proof of concept research and the development of a prototype. Unfortunately, there are limited financial resources for this sort of research and development. I am very pleased that the Economic Development Administration has started funding these sorts of activities through its i6 challenges, which are generally focused on accelerating technology

commercialization, and am particularly pleased that the EDA announced an i6 challenge just last week specifically on the development or expansion of proof of concept centers.

Once the technical feasibility of an idea or concept is proven, we have to get that technology out of the lab and into the hands of a private sector entity that can commercialize it. In some cases, this is accomplished by the researcher leaving academia to start his or her own business. But it is also often achieved by the university licensing that technology to an outside company or entrepreneur.

Unfortunately, we have frequently heard from industry that licensing university-developed technology is far from easy or straightforward and that, often, bureaucratic red tape and unnecessary time delays frustrate and – in some cases – deter industry altogether. Our economy can't afford to let good ideas die in university labs. We need to figure out ways to do this more seamlessly, and I am eager to hear from some of our witnesses today about innovative ways of speeding up this process and making it more efficient.

And, finally, once the technology makes its way out of the lab, it needs to be commercialized. This may include large-scale demonstrations and the development of functional prototypes, putting together business plans and management teams, and carrying out market validation activities. Certainly, these are private sector functions. However, when it comes to technologies that have been developed with Federal taxpayer resources, I believe that the Federal Government may have an important role to play in facilitating the commercialization of those technologies.

Our responsibility should be to ensure that Federal taxpayer's get the biggest bang for their buck and that technologies developed with Federal resources make it across the finish line and into the marketplace. There are unfortunately limited resources for commercialization assistance for Federally-funded technologies. I hope today that we can discuss whether there are appropriate leverage points for the Federal Government when it comes to commercializing these sorts of technologies.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this important topic. I also hope that we will be following up this hearing with a separate hearing focused on technology transfer from Federal labs. I am fairly confident that there are a number of members on both sides of the aisle that are very interested in taking a critical look at these efforts and ways that they can be strengthened and improved. I yield back the balance of my time.