December 4, 2019

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
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Washington, DC 20510

Dear House and Senate Appropriations Leaders:

As the President of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), the world’s first and largest scientific organization dedicated to the conquest of cancer, I join distinguished Fellows of the AACR Academy, which includes AACR Past Presidents and many prominent others, to thank you for your exceptional support of medical research and for your steadfast commitment to making the National Institutes of Health (NIH) a national priority.

During the past four-year period, your unstinting dedication to the NIH has resulted in its budget being increased by 30 percent, and we deeply appreciate your current efforts to provide another robust funding increase for the NIH in FY 2020. Your extraordinary leadership is providing the resources that are needed for our nation’s researchers and physician-scientists to significantly accelerate the pace of progress against cancer, as well as the hundreds of other diseases that afflict millions of Americans.

As you and your colleagues on Capitol Hill meet over the next few weeks to finalize the FY 2020 appropriations process before the continuing resolution expires on December 20, we want to express our strong support for the $3 billion funding increase for NIH (to $42.1 billion) that was provided in the Senate Chairman’s mark.

Additionally, we encourage you to accept the House’s recommendation for a $300 million increase (to $6.444 billion) for the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in FY 2020 plus a proportional share of the additional $1 billion that the Senate is proposing for overall NIH funding in its bill.

The AACR, with its more than 44,000 members from 120 countries, has broad expertise in all areas of the field and is dedicated to advancing cancer research and its mission to prevent and cure all of the more than 200 different cancers. During its long existence, the AACR has been at the forefront of every major breakthrough against cancer. We marshal the full spectrum of scientific and clinical knowledge in cancer research to identify the top priorities; convene conferences and educational workshops all over the world; publish eight high-impact, peer-reviewed scientific journals; produce a publication for cancer survivors, patients, and their caregivers; work to raise funds from the philanthropic community for meritorious
cancer research conducted by scientists at all career levels; and advocate for robust, sustained, and predictable annual funding increases for the NIH and NCI.

There has never been a more propitious time in the history of cancer research, which underscores why it is extremely important that the NIH and NCI budgets increase annually at robust rates. In the United States, overall cancer incidence and death rates are declining, while the number of cancer survivors has reached a record high of approximately 17 million, which are in part due to new drug approvals that are rapidly bringing lifesaving cures to patients. Today’s precision medicine is resulting in more successful treatments for cancer patients, often without the punishing side effects that past generations of patients had to endure. This unparalleled progress has been driven largely by federally funded research.

Despite these enormous accomplishments, a concerning trend is taking place. Most notably, there is a falling payline at the NCI, and the success rate for the funding of investigator-initiated research project grants (RPGs) at the NCI has also been declining. This is primarily attributable to the remarkable advances in and enthusiasm for cancer research that have stimulated an unprecedented 50 percent increase in the number of investigator-initiated RPG applications to the NCI since FY 2013.

Additionally, and most importantly, with 606,880 estimated cancer deaths this year alone, our work is far from done. While advances in precision medicine are yielding extraordinary results for some cancer patients, there are still so many cancer patients for whom current therapies are not effective. Furthermore, many patient populations continue to suffer disproportionately from cancer and its associated effects, particularly certain racial and ethnic minority groups, individuals with low socioeconomic status, residents in certain geographic locations, and the elderly. We can and must do more to overcome these unacceptable cancer disparities.

Therefore, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of significant annual budget increases for medical research, and we call on you to remove the threat of a long-term continuing resolution that is so concerning to researchers, patient advocates, and the public by finalizing your work on the FY 2020 appropriations process before December 20.

As you continue your work in earnest, we respectfully urge you to increase our nation’s investment in the NIH by providing $42.1 billion to this lifesaving agency, as well as by allocating $6.444 billion for the NCI that the House is proposing plus a proportional share of the additional $1 billion for NIH that the Senate has included in its FY 2020 bill.

Cancer researchers and physician-scientists, such as the 88 who have signed on to this letter, 12 of whom are Nobel Laureates, are poised to drive forward and deliver further transformative scientific advances that will save more lives from cancer, and we sincerely appreciate your significant ongoing efforts to provide the support that is needed for us to reach this goal.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

Respectfully,

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