

June 26, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander,

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I write to offer comments in response to your white paper, “Preparing for the Next Pandemic” dated June 9, 2020. We commend your work to proactively develop strategies in anticipation of future challenges brought on by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and to invest in our country’s public health resources. For nearly six decades, CGS has served as the national organization dedicated to advancing graduate education and research. CGS’s membership includes nearly 500 institutions of higher education in the United States, Canada, and abroad. Collectively, our members grant 87 percent of all U.S. doctorates and the majority of U.S. master’s degrees. Our members have a vested interest in advancing treatments and cures in response to COVID-19, and we believe that federal support is integral to ensuring the public is able to benefit from research occurring on campuses across the country.

*Recommendation 1.2 Congress and the Administration should continue to support NIH research and its academic partnerships, which have provided key infrastructure to rapidly pivot COVID-19 research and clinical trials.*

Accelerating research and development, as recommended in the white paper, is key to building and maintaining the United States’ ability to advance tests, treatments, and vaccines during a pandemic. To do so, CGS agrees that Congress and the Administration should continue to support critical investments in the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We urge that supplemental funding granted to NIH and other relevant research agencies should reflect both short and long term needs. We have witnessed on several accounts the setbacks and delays that have occurred in campus laboratories and with research staff and personnel due to the current pandemic. For example, biological samples that are sensitive to specific growth periods have had to be abandoned because research staff have been unable to physically access them in the labs due to social distancing precautions. As a result, the samples will need to be restarted, and that can significantly delay the overall progress of a project. Therefore, supplemental funding is a lifeline for federally-funded research that may require extensions due to the public health crisis. We should be wary of short-changing our nation’s research enterprise by not anticipating the financial support that may be required in the future months to years.

Institutions of higher education are preparing the next generation of leading researchers and scientists

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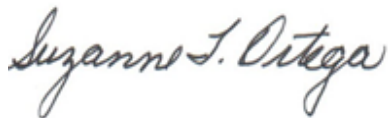
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who will be at the forefront of the next pandemic. Academic institutions bolster the ability of the research pipeline to investigate and translate critical findings. Currently, federal partnerships with institutions of higher education allow ongoing research and development to combat COVID-19. For example, faculty and graduate students at some universities are using protein chemistry and molecular modeling to seek a vaccine solution while others are turning to saline solutions to improve the effectiveness of testing. As we look to leverage academic institutions as leading collaborators, we must continue supporting current graduate students and postdocs performing this vital work. Traineeships and fellowships allow early career scientists to make timely breakthroughs that are responsive to the national need and are opportunities for postdocs and graduate students as the future pipeline of researchers.

At the university level, being able to help graduate students cope psychologically during the pandemic is consistently raised as a top priority among graduate education leaders. In this vein, CGS encourages Congress to provide additional investments in agencies that will address mental and behavioral health as a result of the pandemic. Bolstering clinical research efforts through NIH is inherently important, but so is ensuring that the public has access to services that address mental health disorders, substance abuse, and other issues that have been exacerbated by the economic, social, and emotional toll of COVID-19. Providing additional support for agencies such as the NIH National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services within HHS would also serve communities well both now and in preparation for future public health crises.

Again, we thank you for recognizing the need for critical investments in our research enterprise and the opportunity to provide this feedback. If our organization can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs, Lauren Inouye, at [Linouye@cgs.nche.edu](mailto:Linouye@cgs.nche.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Suzanne T. Ortega". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Suzanne T. Ortega