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Shetal Shah MD

Long Island Chapter (NY-2) American Academy of Pediatrics

3/10/16

RE: (S2014) NEXT GENERATION RESEARCHERS ACT

Dear Senator Gillibrand,  
 As constituents and members of the Long Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics – representing pediatricians and children health providers in Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau and Suffolk Counties, I am writing **TO REQUEST CO-SPONSORSHIP OF S2014: THE NEXT GENERATION RESEARCHERS ACT.** This bipartisan bill, introduced by your colleague Senator Tammy Baldwin and co-sponsored by Senators Alexander and Collins, would authorize the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to encourage new researchers by improving mentorship opportunities and promote more diversity in the healthcare research workforce. Most importantly, the bill would allow NIH to develop new programs for young researchers. The bill’s companion passed the House of Representatives last year with bipartisan support.

The NIH funding environment is the worst it has been in almost 2 decades. Since then increases in funding have not kept pace with inflation in regard to research costs, decreasing the amount of research work which could be completed. This was followed by the devastating effects of sequestration. According to testimony provided by NIH Director Francis Collins, the NIH has lost 22% of its purchasing power since 2003. The result has been the worst climate for federally funded research in a generation. (1).

Young investigators have been especially affected by these financial constraints. When NIH grant applications are considered, established investigators – whose prior experience with grants and track-record of publications – have an advantage in obtaining renewals of existing grant funds. Young investigators who lack such experience and have yet to establish credibility as NIH scientists must compete for an ever-limited number of NEW grant funds. In a statement published by the Associated Press, Dr. Collins, commenting on young investigators, said they find themselves in the worst financial environment in half a century (1).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the percentage of NIH principal investigators 36 and younger was approximately 3% in 2010, down from 18% in 1982. Not surprisingly, the number of established investigators over the age of 66 has increased steadily over the same time span. Over the next decade the United States will cease to be the world leader in biomedical research (2).

According to the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, over 126.5 million dollars of NIH funds are distributed across Long Island at centers such as Stony Brook University, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, as well as medical centers such as Cohen’s Children’s Hospital, Winthrop University Hospital and the Feinstein Institute for Biomedical Research at Northwell Health (formerly North Shore/ Long Island Jewish Medical Center) (3). Failing to fund new researchers contributes to the loss of young scientists from the field, which coupled with our high cost of living; contribute to Long Island’s “Brain Drain” phenomenon.

Unless new policies and new programs with dedicated funding streams are created, newly-minted pediatric researchers will not be able to develop the treatments needed to cure today’s currently terminal childhood diseases. The Next Generation Researchers Act would create an NIH initiative to help recruit new researchers to enter biomedical science and task the National Academy of Science to report on the impact of the federal budget cuts on research opportunities.

**For these reasons as for your long-standing dedication to the health of New York’s children, we ask you to co-sponsor S2014, the Next Generation Researchers Act.** If we can be of further assistance regarding information on the importance of this legislative bill’s local impact, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for all you do for children.

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American Academy of Pediatrics NY Chapter 2 Legislative Chairman

REFERENCES

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2. Moses H, Matheson DM, Cairns-Smith S et al. The Anatomy of Medical Research: US and International Comparisons. *JAMA.*2015;313(2):174-189
3. Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. Available at: https://www.faseb.org/Science-Policy-and-Advocacy/Federal-Funding-Data/Federal-Funding-by-State-and-District.aspx