

Senator Bill Cassidy, MD
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

October 26, 2023

Dear Ranking Member Cassidy,

The Endocrine Society appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Request for Information (RFI) on ways to reform the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Founded in 1916, the Endocrine Society is the world's oldest, largest, and most active organization devoted to research on hormones and the clinical practice of endocrinology. Our membership of over 18,000 includes basic and clinical researchers supported by grants from the NIH who are making discoveries about human biology and translating those findings into new treatments and therapies for patients around the world. Our members participate on grant review panels, serve as mentors and educators for the next generation of biomedical researchers, and conduct research with industry partners. We affirm that NIH has a proven and longstanding record of success in delivering public health interventions that have improved the lives of citizens in the United States and around the world. In our comments, we identify several areas that the Committee could consider in efforts to improve NIH processes without destabilizing one of the world's premier public health institutions.

Coordination on Endocrine Diseases

The organization of NIH into Institutes and Centers (ICs) by disease area or organ system enables additional levels of strategic prioritization and focus that have driven breakthroughs and improved the care of patients with many diseases. However, this organization may not reflect the realities of interrelated biological systems or fields like endocrinology, where our members study how different organ systems communicate with one another or how diseases like obesity impact the entire body. For complex disorders, even those like diabetes and cancer where there is clear alignment with the missions of specific ICs, coordination between different ICs and agencies is critical to identify research opportunities that lie at the interface of different disciplines. How obesity may contribute to cancer incidence and progression, or how environmental exposures may influence neurological development are examples of endocrine-related research that do not fit neatly into one IC's work. We encourage NIH to continue to support coordination efforts such as the Diabetes Mellitus Interagency Coordinating Committee, NIH Pediatric Research Consortium, and Task Force on Research Specific to Pregnant Women and Lactating Women and identify other areas where such coordination could inform funding priorities and strategies across NIH.

Advancing Equity in Biomedical Research

The NIH has made remarkable strides in advancing the health of women, and we recognize and support the NIH Policy on the Inclusion of Women in Clinical Trials as well as the more recent policy on Sex as



a Biological Variable (SABV). Furthermore, NIH has implemented new policies to create a more inclusive and equitable biomedical research workforce with outputs that benefit all populations, for example through the UNITE Initiative. The Endocrine Society enthusiastically supports such efforts, which are critical to ensure that all of society benefits from the results of taxpayer investments in biomedical research. Policies such as SABV, or efforts to pursue equity through unbiased peer review, rely on the active participation of grant reviewers for their successful implementation, and NIH should ensure that agency and Institute leadership communicate the intent of these policies and their expected outcomes as part of training for grant reviewers. Careful and periodic monitoring of outputs affected by the policies, such as publications enhancing our knowledge of the influence of sex on biological processes or improved diversity on grant review panels, should also be encouraged.

Grant Review Panel Improvements

As a community of researchers who are funded by as many as 18 different ICs, our members often investigate biological processes at the interface between the missions of different ICs, or study diseases and conditions that do not obviously sort into the domain of a specific review panel. Fairness in grant review requires that individuals with expertise in hormone biology and endocrinology are part of the panel charged with reviewing endocrine-related grants, as is true for other disciplines. We support the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) in their efforts to provide accurate information about the types of grants considered by each review panel; we anticipate that this will help applicants understand why their proposals may be assigned to certain panels and ensure alignment of their research with strategic research priorities. We also support CSRs efforts to streamline grant application processes to ensure that reviews are focused on the scientific merit of the proposal under consideration.

In conclusion, NIH as the world's preeminent funder of biomedical research remains a compelling success story for the US Congress and the American people. While we identify several areas that may be considered to improve NIH's processes in alignment with the agency's mission and goals, we urge the Committee to proceed judiciously with any next steps following analysis of the responses to this RFI. Thank you for considering the Endocrine Society's comments. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Joe Laakso, PhD, Director of Science Policy at jlaakso@endocrine.org.

Sincerely,

Stephen R. Hammes, MD, PhD
President, Endocrine Society