October ??, 2014

Dear Senator:

The undersigned members of the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research, which represents patients and their families, scientists, research institutions, health care providers, and industry, strongly urge you and your colleagues to make fiscal year (FY) 2015 appropriations legislation the top priority when you return in November and to work in a bipartisan manner to pass final, omnibus spending legislation before the end of the calendar year. This omnibus spending package should include an FY 2015 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill that restores funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to at a minimum pre-sequestration levels.

The breakdown of this year’s appropriations process and the need once again to enact a short-term continuing resolution (CR) to continue funding for medical research creates inefficiencies, and impedes long term planning by NIH and the institutions and scientists it supports throughout the nation. Under a CR, NIH typically cannot issue new grants and often withholds funds from existing projects, adding uncertainty to a system that is already under stress. More concerning, it delays hope to the millions of Americans who look to medical research as the answer to disease and disability.

In addition, Congress has repeatedly failed even to debate the Labor-HHS spending bill through regular order. It has been almost a decade since the last Labor-HHS spending bill was enacted as stand-alone legislation, and it has been three years since the House has even introduced a Labor-HHS spending bill.

We also are concerned that important emergency funding added to the CR has been offset by an across-the-board-cut. While relatively small, this cut compounds the impact of deep cuts already taken since 2010 due to federal austerity measures, including sequestration.

Sustained, predictable, real growth in federal support for medical research funded by NIH in your state is essential for making real and continued progress in bringing treatments and cures to patients. Yet, the NIH budget has failed to keep pace with inflation for the past decade, declining by more than 22 percent since 2003 after adjusting for inflation. This is happening at the same time that countries are greatly increasing their investments in biomedical research, thereby creating an innovation deficit for the United States. An omnibus spending bill with a Labor-HHS appropriation restoring NIH to at least pre-sequester funding levels would mark an important step toward a more sustainable, predictable research environment for patients and their families, as well as for those working to address disease. It also would be a step in the right direction to close the innovation deficit.

Members in both chambers and from both parties have expressed enthusiastic endorsements for the life-saving medical research conducted and funded by NIH. Congress needs to finish the job and enact omnibus spending legislation for FY 2015 that restores NIH funding to pre-sequestration levels. Only through thoughtful and transparent consideration of appropriations bills can lawmakers ensure we are able to address our nation’s health challenges. The American people are depending on it.

Sincerely,