December 6, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
United States Senate  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Alexander,

Vanderbilt University (VU) and Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) jointly applaud Congress’ sustained efforts over the past two years to advance lifesaving biomedical research legislation in the form of the 21st Century Cures Act. In particular, we wish to thank you for your leadership and the tireless work you have undertaken in the Senate to shape and shepherd this package through the legislative process.

As you know, the 21st Century Cures Act provides critical added resources to the National Institutes of Health in a fiscally responsible manner. These resources would be directed to specific priorities including the Precision Medicine Initiative and the Cancer Moonshot. Both of these initiatives have the potential to usher in groundbreaking new science and, ultimately, new therapeutic interventions for patients. Vanderbilt is proud to play a foundational role in both initiatives. For example, Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center Director Jennifer Pietenpol was chosen to serve on the National Cancer Moonshot Blue Ribbon Panel. Vanderbilt University Medical Center has also served as a pilot site and now the Data and Research Support Center for the Precision Medicine Initiative Cohort Program. The additional support the Cures Act provides to these initiatives will go far toward ensuring their success and delivery of tangible benefits to Americans.

In addition, we applaud the effort to improve accountability of federal dollars invested in research by streamlining and harmonizing regulations. We agree that smart, efficient regulations provide important protections and hold institutions and researchers accountable for the federal dollars they receive. At the same time, we believe taxpayers have an interest in ensuring that federal research dollars are being spent in efficient and effective ways. We strongly support efforts to reduce the administrative burdens related to the monitoring of sub-recipients of grants, particularly in cases where those sub-recipients are already subject to significant scrutiny by federal agencies. Similarly, we are supportive of the creation of a Research Policy Board that can help reduce the burden on individual researchers who must currently comply with different reporting and proposal requirements at various federal agencies.

VUMC, as a top-ranked teaching health system directly taking care of patients, is also pleased to note the inclusion of important refinements to Medicare policy in Cures, such as language related to socioeconomic status (SES) adjustment in the Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program. We also have closely monitored the inclusion of reforms to data sharing, telehealth, and the interoperability of health information technology. Finally, Vanderbilt applauds the efforts of Congress to include in the Cures Act package provisions to help address the challenges we face nationally in expanding access to behavioral health services, as well as the opioid abuse public health crisis.
As the 114th Congress comes to a close, we can think of no more fitting way to end the year than by passing the 21st Century Cures Act. Doing so reaffirms our country’s commitment to biomedical research and medical innovation and ensures our place as the world leader in treating and curing disease. At Vanderbilt, we are honored to play our part in advancing discovery and translating research to clinical care in partnership with the National Institutes of Health and many others who support and sustain our biomedical research enterprise.

Thank you, again, for your signal efforts. We deeply appreciate the thoughtfulness you and your staff have shown by engaging the research and patient communities in the legislative process. The end result is a 21st Century Cures Act that will help ensure lifesaving research continues to take place in Tennessee and across the country.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey R. Balser, MD, PhD
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Dean, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

Susan R. Wente, PhD
Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs
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