July 19, 2016

The Honorable Daniel Lipinski
United States House of Representatives
2346 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lipinski:

I write to offer my support for your committed efforts to improve accountability of federal taxpayer dollars invested in science and engineering research at America's universities and research organizations by streamlining and harmonizing regulations.

I agree that smart, efficient regulations provide important protections and hold institutions accountable for the federal dollars they receive. At the same time, I believe taxpayers have an interest in ensuring that federal research dollars are being spent in efficient and effective ways. Unfortunately, as you rightfully point out, university researchers and administrators are spending an increasing amount of time completing paperwork and preparing new grant proposals and less time actually carrying out research that could lead to new technologies or discoveries.

Your introduction of H.R. 5583 makes a number of common sense proposals that would reduce the administrative burden on researchers and university administrators without sacrificing important accountability measures. In particular, I strongly support your proposal to exempt from subrecipient monitoring institutions that are already subject to a single audit. This is a clear example of a duplicative and unnecessarily burdensome regulation. The National Academies included this among the recommendations in its 2015 report on regulatory reform, and I applaud you for seeking to enact that recommendation into law. I also support your efforts to encourage agencies to coordinate new and existing regulations as well as grant application and reporting formats through the Research Policy Board. This step would go a long way in reducing the burden on individual researchers who must currently comply with different reporting and proposal requirements at various federal research agencies.

In studies that my colleagues and I conducted to examine the costs of compliance associated with federal regulations, we found that institutions spend on average eight percent of their research expenditures on compliance with grants and contracts including pre- and post-award management, effort reporting, subrecipient monitoring, and post-award accounting. While many of these checks and balances are needed to ensure that scarce resources are being spent appropriately, I believe the same goal could be achieved with smarter, more efficient regulations.

Thank you for tackling this most important topic and advocating for common sense reforms that will ultimately allow researchers to focus on what they do best – discover new solutions to the many challenges that face our society.

Sincerely,

Nicholas S. Zeppos
Chancellor

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