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The RISE Act (H.R. 869/S.289)

Bipartisan legislation led by Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo) and Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass)

The *Research Investment to Spark the Economy Act of 2021 (RISE) Act* (H.R. 869/ S. 289), bipartisan legislation led by Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) and Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), would authorize \$25 billion for federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institutes of Health (NIH), to offset costs resulting from reductions in research productivity in connection with the COVID-19 global pandemic. This legislation acknowledges that while agencies have provided flexibility to awardees during COVID-19 pandemic, the threat to existing research remains significant as projects have been slowed down or stopped due to modified campus and laboratory operations.

COVID-19 has disrupted research operations, weakened experimental infrastructure, and threatened financial stability.

While the Federal Government has made significant investments in new scientific research to address COVID-19 and support researchers, existing work has been paused or halted altogether and many projects sit in a mist of uncertainty.¹ Researchers specifically recount the devastating impacts on data collection. They cite substantial challenges in participant recruitment, delivery of interventions, and subsequent assessment. Typically, these activities are performed in person, but most studies have been forced to move to a virtual environment. Often, experimental designs do not adequately translate to remote or virtual platforms, and what data that is collected may ultimately be unusable. Despite COVID-related no-cost extensions offered by many Federal agencies, certain costs continue to accrue, further depleting the supplemental funding. Experiments may not have resumed after being disrupted initially by the global pandemic. These delays significantly slow data analysis and jeopardize the work to be completed during the timeline of the grant.

To address this, the RISE Act would help relieve the strain that Federal agencies and researchers currently struggle with and sustain the vitality of the research and development enterprise in the U.S. by:

- Providing supplemental funding to extend awards disrupted by the pandemic while offering flexibility on any prior or subsequent awards impacted by limitations due to COVID-19;
- Enabling students, post-doctoral researchers, research scientists and associations, staff, and principals to complete ongoing research efforts, and extending the training of students or post-doctoral researchers because of disruption in the job market;
- Replacing, refurbishing, or otherwise making usable lab supplies, equipment or animals required for research, and supporting training in online course delivery and virtual research experiences;
- Facilitating research at institutions disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and issuing awards to conduct research on the effects of COVID-19 and future pandemics; and
- Maintaining experimental field campaigns and infrastructure, including through replacement of disrupted experimental data to enable completion of impacted research.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on all sectors of society. Academic medical centers have not been spared, and research faculty within these institutions are uniquely affected not only because of their contributions to COVID-19–related clinical operations but also because of barriers to non–COVID-19–related research operations. Among these research faculty, underrepresented minority faculty are especially vulnerable given baseline disparities in research, operational, and network support. Whereas many research programs have been allowed to resume operations, many are still not at 100% capacity due to public health restrictions and the impact of the loss of personnel or funds.”²

The scientific research funded by U.S. federal agencies has been vital to combat the global pandemic.

Many federal agencies like the NIH and NSF have provided research awardees with flexibility during COVID-19 in order to support continuity of key staff and students, and to facilitate critical and timely research in response to the pandemic. Agencies have allowed federally funded laboratories to donate necessary equipment, such as personal protective equipment, to support hospitals and first responders. The U.S. must sustain and invest in the critical human infrastructure that undergirds the scientific research enterprise – it has made the U.S. the global leader in innovation, strengthened the health of U.S. citizens, and catalyzed economic development. Although federal agencies may be able to offer award extensions to cover time lost, considerable challenges remain that will affect the completion of that agencies’ research missions and priorities.

COVID-19 has damaged the current research workforce and stunted the pipeline of scientists.

In response to these uncertain conditions, some institutions have announced changes to promotion and tenure processes, including one-year tenure clock extensions and limiting the impact student teaching evaluations this term.³ Timely supplemental resources are needed as many researchers also hold significant teaching responsibilities. During the pandemic, investigators have restructured courses for online formats and spent considerable time managing students, post-doctoral fellows, and staff remotely. The consequences of these delays and interruptions could be felt for years. Evidence reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on early-career scientists, female researchers, and scientists of color.^{4,5}

Without additional funding, future advances in health, science, technology, and education will be significantly harmed as federal agencies are forced to use future appropriations intended for new research to cover existing awards. APA is also very concerned that the research workforce and future health and strength of the U.S. research enterprise are at risk during this time. The RISE Act must be passed to ensure future innovations and to remain competitive in the global research environment.

References

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