



May 2, 2023

Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D.
Acting Director
National Institutes of Health
1 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Tabak:

On behalf of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC), we commend the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) for formally endorsing the landmark recommendations from the ACD Working Group on Diversity, Subgroup on Individuals with Disabilities (“the Subgroup”). The DRRC and our members strongly endorse these recommendations. ***If implemented by NIH, these recommendations would mark a watershed moment in the longstanding pursuit of disability inclusion within the scientific workforce.***

The DRRC is a coalition of 25 national research, clinical, and consumer non-profit organizations committed to improving the science of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation. The DRRC seeks to maximize the return on the federal research investment in these areas with the goal of improving the ability of Americans with disabilities to live and function as independently as possible following an injury, illness, disability, or chronic condition.

The DRRC and its members have long urged NIH and the entire Administration to fully recognize the need for greater inclusion of people with disabilities across the scientific workforce and to address disability as an integral part of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). ***We strongly support the work of the Subgroup and the recommendations contained within this report and hope they will be implemented swiftly.*** We are especially pleased that NIH has announced its staff is reviewing these recommendations to identify short-, medium-, and long-term priorities for adoption. We recognize that not all of these ideas can be implemented immediately but urge the agency to prioritize their implementation as soon as possible.

In particular, we continue to urge NIH, especially the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), to formally designate people with disabilities as a health disparity population. The DRRC called on NIH to make this designation in April 2022, following the National Council on Disability’s recommendation to do so in the Health Equity Framework for People with Disabilities. We hope that NIH will give this request full consideration and make a

decision based on the extensive clinical evidence detailing the pervasive health disparities faced by the disability population.

Beyond the Subgroup report, we applaud NIH's recent efforts to develop proposals and plans to address DEIA across the intramural, extramural, and external scientific workforce, including NIH-funded institutions. With the recent publication of the NIH Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity (COSWD) Strategic Plan, as well as the NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for DEIA, we believe NIH is well-positioned to prioritize these efforts in the coming years and meaningfully affect change in the scientific workforce. However, we also note that these recommendations and strategic plans will only achieve their goals of fostering a culture of truly inclusive excellence if they are properly implemented. It is critical that NIH commit the necessary resources to carrying out these recommendations, including through developing data-driven, collaborative, transparent, and measurable procedures for facilitating DEIA.

Consistent with the aims of Executive Orders 13895 and 14035, we urge NIH to ensure that the inclusion of scientists and researchers with disabilities is an agency-wide priority, bolstered by commitments at the leadership and Institute levels, to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes for the disability community. The DRRC stands ready to support NIH in implementation of these goals, including facilitating connections throughout the disability community and engaging with policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure that the agency receives the resources necessary to achieve true change.

We greatly appreciate your consideration and commitment to these recommendations and NIH's ongoing efforts to advance disability inclusion across NIH's Institutes and Centers and the entire scientific workforce. We look forward to continuing to engage with NIH as the agency addresses implementation of these recommendations and offer any support that we can provide. Our member organizations strongly support the recommendations as an essential step forward for the entire scientific community. If you have any questions, or if the DRRC can provide any assistance to you and your colleagues, please do not hesitate to contact Peter Thomas, DRRC Coordinator, at Peter.Thomas@PowersLaw.com, or call 202-466-6550.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Members of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition

American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*

American Association on Health & Disability

American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine

American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association

American Music Therapy Association

American Occupational Therapy Association*

American Physical Therapy Association*

American Therapeutic Recreation Association

Amputee Coalition

Association of Academic Physiatrists*

Association of Rehabilitation Nurses

Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Brain Injury Association of America*
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
National Association of Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers*
National Neurotrauma Society
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America
Spina Bifida Association
United Spinal Association

**** DRRC Steering Committee Member***

CC:

Dr. Tara Schwetz, Acting Principal Deputy Director

Dr. Robert Eisinger, Acting Deputy Director for Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives

Dr. Marie Bernard, Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity

Dr. Eliseo Pérez-Stable, Director, National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities

Dr. Alison Cernich, Deputy Director, National Institute on Child Health and Human Development

Dr. Theresa Cruz, Director, National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research

Dr. Kathleen Mann Koepke, Chair, NIH ABILITIES Employee Resource Group

Kevin Williams, Director, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

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David Rice, Jr., Acting Director, Special Emphasis Program Branch, Diversity and Inclusion Division, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion