

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2006

Elias Zerhouni, MD
Director
National Institutes of Health
Building 1
1 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

We are taking this opportunity to stress the continued Congressional interest in basic behavioral science research at NIH. As we have previously indicated, our interest stems from the fact that in any oversight of health issues, a core finding is that behavior is central to many of our Nation's leading health concerns: heart disease; stroke; lung disease; obesity; AIDS, suicide; teen pregnancy; drug abuse; depression; neurological disorders; alcoholism; violence; accidents; etc., and that much basic research is needed to effectively address these conditions. With one of the largest budgets in history at NIH, we have no question that a comprehensive basic behavioral science research program can be initiated.

As you know, there has been a long series of Congressional correspondence with NIH on this matter, as well as a long history of Congressional report language urging appropriate action on this matter at least since Fiscal Year 1999. Your own Working Group of the Director's Advisory Committee recommended in December 2004 that a basic behavioral research and training program be newly established at NIH, within an appropriate institute, such as NIGMS. Despite the consistent and repeated recommendations from the Congress and expert panels, including the National Academy of Sciences in its recent report on research training, NIH has not initiated a new program in support of basic behavioral research and training.

The most recent recommendation from Congress included language in the FY 2006 Conference Agreement on the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill, Report 109-337. The language was what we each encouraged be included in the bill and relates to the Congressional interest in creating a structural framework for managing a NIH basic behavioral research program. The language follows: *"The conferees are disappointed that the director of NIH has not yet responded to the recommendations of the ACD working group on research opportunities in the basic behavioral sciences. The conferees urge the director of NIH, in consultation with senior IC leadership and the OBSSR, to develop a structural framework for managing support of NIH basic behavioral science research. This framework should include a division of portfolio and funding responsibility among the affected IC's, and should encourage co-funded trans-Institute research initiatives. The conferees request a report to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees describing the new framework and its relationship to the Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives by May 1, 2006."*

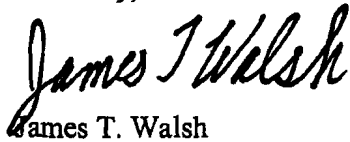
Dr. Elias Zerhouni

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Given the time and amount of study that has gone into this issue, it is our hope that action will be forthcoming to make the structural changes referenced by the conference agreement. We look forward to your response to the important issues raised and your sense of how NIH is working toward the goals laid out in the conference language.

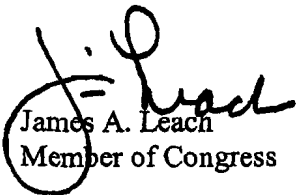
Sincerely,



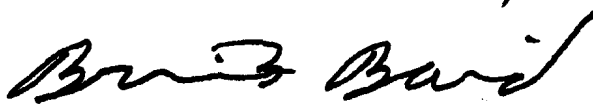
James T. Walsh
Member of Congress



Patrick J. Kennedy
Member of Congress



James A. Leach
Member of Congress



Brian Baird
Member of Congress

cc: Dr. Jeremy M. Berg, Ph.D., Director, National Institute of General Medical Sciences