

April 22, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer:

Congratulations on the introduction of the 2021 Endless Frontier Act. The Association for Psychological Science (APS) is pleased to relay its reactions and feedback regarding the act. APS is a 30,000-member international scientific society dedicated to advancing research psychology for the benefit of science and society; many of APS's U.S.-based members receive essential support from the National Science Foundation (NSF), particularly its Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) Directorate.

APS is grateful to you and your colleagues for your interest in increasing funding for NSF; we support the bold increases proposed for the agency in the act. We are especially appreciative to see that the act includes mechanisms for increases in funding to the SBE directorate, which enables fundamental cross-cutting research by psychologists and others addressing problems including increasing productivity in the workplace, adapting to needs of an aging population, and improving our knowledge of the many human elements behind cybersecurity. Currently, SBE is the smallest of NSF's directorates, accounting for less than 4% of the entire NSF budget. Given behavioral science's central importance to addressing so many ongoing challenges in our country, we think greater investments in this research are urgently needed.

It is for this reason that we echo the message relayed in our June 29, 2020 letter to your office, reattached here for your convenience. We remain concerned that the Endless Frontier Act and the proposed Technology Directorate might diminish the excellent behavioral science supported by NSF and risks derailing the NSF mission of supporting basic science.

We appreciate that the EFA acknowledges that its aims are to "supplement, not supplant." We think that more is needed in the act to achieve this goal, to protect SBE sciences and ensure that future evolutions of NSF grow not only the amount of support that goes to SBE research but also leverage the science supported by this directorate to advance other fields. The small relative proportion of funding that goes to SBE sends a signal that social, behavioral, and economic factors only bear indirectly on the agency's pursuit of advancing health, prosperity, security, and welfare. We know this is not the case; behavioral science is central to scientific discovery and application, and SBE needs more resources. One suggestion is that you add bill language that would ensure that at least one focus area of the Technology Directorate be a behavioral science-centered issue.

Our other concern pertains to NSF's general mission of supporting curiosity-driven science. Early discussions around the Endless Frontier Act gave us a sense of assurance that NSF's mission of supporting fundamental and use-inspired basic research would be protected. We urge you to maintain this focus and ensure that basic research remains an agency priority and that no developments come at the cost of basic science. NSF should also support translational research that aims to bring discoveries in behavioral science toward application. NSF's critical support of investigator-initiated curiosity-driven science makes it unique among other agencies in the U.S.; more, its support for basic research in

behavioral science makes it truly unique among other organizations across the globe, as Congress observed in fiscal year 2021 appropriations (H. Rpt. 116-455, p. 133-134). Basic science—and basic behavioral science specifically—are NSF’s advantages. Any legislation focused on NSF must not sacrifice the agency’s unique role as the incubator for discovery and new knowledge.

We also encourage that the Endless Frontier Act empower NSF with new ways to be a global leader in science funding. NSF must look beyond the U.S.’s borders for scientific opportunities and must expand support for international collaborations so that U.S.-based scientists can learn from and work with experts from other countries and share our own country’s insights in return, as appropriate. Psychological scientists know well that human behavior is not always constant over cultural or geographic boundaries. For this reason, NSF must increase funding for cross-cultural research, especially in SBE.

Aside from these concerns, APS is glad to see the Endless Frontier Act’s focus on encouraging full representation of historically disadvantaged groups in science, as well as additional infrastructure in explicit support of participation of these groups. Likewise, we are heartened that the act recognizes the value of strengthened support and training opportunities for students in science and early-career scientists.

As the dynamics of the COVID-19 crisis evolve, we look back and recognize how human behavior has been central to the transmission and mitigation of the virus. Understanding the behavioral and social reasons behind vaccine hesitancy and encouraging the adoption of healthy behaviors is key. Stronger historical support for behavioral science may have lessened COVID-19’s effects. Now, NSF has an opportunity to prepare for future global health, economic, and environmental crises by strengthening support for behavioral science.

Again, we thank you for your recognition of the importance of science and the National Science Foundation to improving the U.S.’s ability to solve global problems and increase opportunity for so many. We look forward to the eventual enactment of Endless Frontier legislation, and we hope that the act protects and promote basic and translational behavioral science in the same way it would grow applied science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns, and thank you for your efforts to reinvigorate our nation’s scientific research enterprise. Please do not hesitate to contact me (rgropp@psychologicalscience.org) or APS Director of Government Relations Dr. Andy DeSoto (adesoto@psychologicalscience.org) if we may provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



Robert Gropp, Ph.D.
Executive Director