



CONTACT:

Jeff Martin
Director, Communications
and Public Affairs
571-483-1163
Mobile: 240-393-1149
jmartin@aaanet.org

April 16, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman, Committee Science, Space and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Ranking Member, Committee on Science, Space and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson:

On behalf of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), I am writing to express deep concern about the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (H.R. 1806), or the COMPETES Act, which is being considered by your Committee. Founded in 1902, AAA is the world's largest professional anthropology organization, with more than 9,000 members dedicated to advancing human understanding and addressing the world's most pressing problems.

The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee has historically spurred the development of a strong national science and technology enterprise by working with the scientific community to create a shared vision for the future and supporting strong and sustained funding to reach these goals. The America COMPETES Acts of 2007 and 2010, which passed with bipartisan support, demonstrate this commitment. However, the latest version now appears to counter that commitment.

AAA joins a long list of prominent coalitions (such as the Consortium of Social Science Associations, the Coalition for National Science Funding and the Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences) objecting to the legislation which, if enacted, would decimate federal support for critical programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF), an organization that has proven its value to the U.S. economy, national security, and the health of our citizens.

The damage to the U.S. scientific enterprise would be irreparable and impact colleges and universities across the country, including those in your districts. Such a cut would undermine research that has already provided a significant benefit to America and societies throughout the world. Consider the breakthroughs that would not have been possible without federal support. For example:

- Anthropologists were the first to ascertain one of the reasons Ebola was spreading so quickly was the fact that certain societies in the affected areas wait up to 10 days before burying their dead. Culturally, they were also fearful of bringing their

2300 Clarendon Blvd, Ste 1301
Arlington, VA 22201
Tel 703-528-1902
Fax 703-528-3546
www.aaanet.org

affected relatives to a hospital cared for by Western doctors.

- Researchers at Washington University in St. Louis investigated emotion recognition using nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, vocal tones and body language. Based on this research, the Army Research Institute now incorporates education on nonverbal communication into soldier training, thereby assisting troops in understanding cross-cultural, nonverbal communication with non-English speaking citizens with whom they interact overseas. Thus, this research has the potential to provide human solutions in military situations.
- Local police forces have become our frontline behavioral health workers as often they are the first to encounter the mentally ill, substance abusers, etc. Anthropologists have begun to work with police around the country to understand these behaviors and the network of safety institutions that are available.

We certainly agree that federal operations must be mindful of current fiscal conditions, but we believe it is ill-advised to leave it up to Congress to determine which categories of science funding should be increased and which should be cut. Therefore, we also strongly urge you to allow the NSF to decide its own directorate funding through its highly regarded merit review process – which is the envy of the world.

It is our hope that, under your leadership, a strong reauthorization bill for the nation's science agencies will again set forth a robust vision to maintain our leadership in science and technology. Simply put, it is vital to our nation's future.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Ed Liebow
Executive Director
American Anthropological Association