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Public Testimony Submitted by the Endocrine Society

To the

Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee

January 27, 2014

The Endocrine Society appreciates the opportunity submit the following testimony regarding conference and travel spending across the Federal government, with an emphasis on travel to international scientific conferences. The Endocrine Society is the world's largest and most active professional organization of endocrinologists representing more than 17,000 members worldwide and nearly 10,000 in the United States. We are dedicated to promoting excellence in research, education, and clinical practice in the field of endocrinology. Restrictions on government employee travel to scientific conferences negatively impact both the exchange of scientific information and the generation of new ideas and collaborations (i.e., innovation). We therefore strongly oppose current government policies that severely restrict travel by federal employees to scientific conferences.

The annual meeting of the Endocrine Society, ENDO, is the premier scientific conference in the world devoted to endocrinology. ENDO is critical for information exchange, professional development, and ongoing education for clinicians and researchers. In 2013, ENDO attracted over 9,300 attendees from around the world; of these, over 190 were government or military researchers. At ENDO, participants are exposed to cutting-edge research at invited lectures by leading researchers in the field. Attendees also gather at poster presentations to interact with scientists at all career stages, where they engage in informal discussions about new and ongoing projects. All of these interactions are essential to the conduct of science, and the participation of government scientists and clinicians is crucial not just for their own professional development, but for the conduct of biomedical research more generally.

In response to onerous restrictions on travel by government employees, both through Obama Administration Executive Order 13589¹ and the Coburn Amendment

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¹<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/09/executive-order-promoting-efficient-spending> Accessed January 23, 2014



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#2060 to the Postal Service Reauthorization Bill², the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will only approve travel to a conference by a Principal Investigator (PI) when the PI is actively participating in a high-profile function. As we have come to understand from conversations with researchers, this has been interpreted such that the employee must deliver an invited lecture. At meetings, such as ENDO, internal policies prohibit a scientist from delivering an invited lecture in consecutive years. This policy ensures a diverse pool of speakers at the meeting and provides broad opportunities to present research, particularly for early career investigators. Yearly attendance at conferences, in any field, is critical to stay up to date on rapidly advancing ideas and technologies. With the current restrictive travel policies in place, government scientists face a severe disadvantage relative to their peers in non-governmental institutions.

While an invited lecture represents an excellent venue for scientists to showcase a particular research study, poster presentations and other informal interactions often provide more personal and effective platforms to exchange information. It is principally through these more informal discussions that novel ideas and collaborations develop between geographically disparate researchers, at all stages of their careers. These spontaneous interactions are not easily replicated in online settings and are fundamental to the efficient exchange of information and the overall conduct of science.

Furthermore, due to excessive travel restrictions, talented students and trainees are deprived of the opportunity to meet and discuss their work with senior government investigators and program managers. As a result, these trainees are deprived of knowledge needed to make an informed decision on whether or not to join research teams at the NIH intramural campus and other government research labs. Government scientists, like researchers at universities, rely on teams of talented staff to conduct experiments and operate sophisticated instrumentation. Early and mid-career government investigators, who generally lack the recognition of more senior scientists, are particularly vulnerable as they will miss vital networking opportunities with talented trainees.

Restrictive policies also negatively impact the broader community of biomedical research scientists. Government scientists and staff bring a unique and valuable perspective to meetings. The Endocrine Society encourages NIH Institutes and

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²http://www.coburn.senate.gov/public//index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=3eba9eff-75cb-46a9-8159-5160670034a9 Accessed January 23, 2014



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Centers with close ties to the endocrine community to set up booths at ENDO in order to interact with attendees. Program Officers, for example, offer valuable advice on applying for grants. Government staff also provide invaluable information on institute priorities and long-term plans. At the same time, NIH institute staff can more thoroughly monitor new developments and emerging areas of research through the exchange of information at meetings. This, in turn, will inform and impact strategic plans, to align programmatic decisions with the latest ideas and approaches. The presence of government scientists at meetings therefore significantly increases the overall efficiency of the grant development and approval processes.

In summary, attendance by government employees at scientific conferences has tremendous value for government researchers as well as the broader biomedical research community. Regular participation by government employees at conferences is also critical for the overall efficiency of the scientific enterprise. The Endocrine Society recognizes the difficulties faced by government agencies in achieving cost savings in the challenging financial environment; however, we caution that the restrictions, as currently implemented, will result in inefficiencies that could delay the development of new or improved therapies for patients. The Endocrine Society therefore encourages the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee to revise current guidelines, enabling government scientists to be full and active participants in the scientific enterprise by lifting the onerous and ill-conceived restrictions that preclude the participation of government employees in the full spectrum of conference activity. The Endocrine Society would be happy to assist the Committee in identifying policies that achieve cost savings without introducing inefficiencies due to excessive travel restrictions. If we can be of service in your efforts, please contact us at govt-prof@endocrine.org.

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