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On Behalf of the Friends of NIEHS

For the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Addressing the National Institutes of Health (NIH) / National Institute of Environmental Health
Sciences (NIEHS)

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The Friends of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) are pleased to submit the following testimony regarding Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 federal appropriations for the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies in support of the vital work being carried out by the NIH/NIEHS as a result of the annual appropriation provided for this work in the Subcommittee's bill. We ask you to provide at least \$996 million for NIEHS in FY2027 as part of an overall appropriation for NIH of \$51.3 billion not inclusive of other funds for the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) or pandemic preparedness.

Our coalition of organizations represents a variety of interests, including medical and scientific professional societies, environmental and public health focused organizations, children's health advocates, and many others. Collectively, our community supports and calls attention to the vital work being done by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). As one of the component Institutes and Centers of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), NIEHS focuses on the prevention of health problems and diseases with special emphasis on the intimate interactions between our bodies and the environments where we live, work, and play over our lifetimes.

NIEHS Plays a Unique Role in Advancing Public Health Priorities

The NIEHS plays a unique role within the NIH; it is the leading institute conducting research to prevent human illness and disability by understanding how the environment influences the development and progression of human diseases and chronic illnesses such as cancer, autism, asthma, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, autoimmune diseases, chemical intolerance or toxicant-induced loss of tolerance, and chemical sensitivities. Expert research funded by NIEHS addresses diseases across all the NIH Institutes and Centers to identify and develop solutions to environmental contributors to numerous conditions, including novel preventions strategies to address chronic disease. Specific research areas with projects that address national priorities include:

Breast cancer: NIEHS-funded studies have been instrumental in advancing our knowledge about the causes of cancer, including the discovery of the first breast cancer susceptibility gene. In 2019, the NIEHS Sister Study, a national cohort of 50,000 sisters of women who had breast cancer, found that women who use chemical hair dye and chemical hair straighteners have an increased risk of breast cancer, particularly black women. The study results suggest that chemicals in hair products may play a role in breast carcinogenesis and illustrate how environmental factors may influence health risks.

Diabetes and other Metabolic Diseases: Scientists funded by NIEHS are helping us understand how the exposome, or the sum of our collected lifetime exposures, influence chronic disease throughout life. For example, recent evidence suggests that dietary factors could help prevent liver disease following exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Maternal and children's health and environmental exposures: Pregnant women, the developing fetus, and children are uniquely vulnerable to harmful substances in their environment, and the NIEHS plays a critical role in studying these populations. Children are uniquely susceptible to toxicants due to their ongoing development, and they face higher rates of exposure than adults by virtue of how they explore and interact with their environment. To further advance our knowledge of environmental impacts on children's health, NIEHS is leading the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) program. This innovative program will leverage existing cohort studies to create efficiencies and generate new findings. Importantly, many of the ECHO cohorts recruited patients during pregnancy, enabling us to better understand how the environment affects health from conception through adolescence. Additionally, a recent NIEHS-funded study found up to a 20% lower rate of asthma and fewer new asthma cases after air quality improvements were made, including reductions in nitrogen dioxide and PM2.5, and the Southern California Children's Health Study examined new onset cases of asthma in over 4,100 children in the Los Angeles, California area before, during and after air quality improvements.

NIEHS funded investigators examining wildfire smoke exposure during pregnancy in relation to adverse pregnancy outcomes including preterm birth and severe maternal morbidity found wildfire smoke is linked to preterm birth, with more effects in socially vulnerable areas. They continue to link maternal and child health effects to wildfire smoke exposures, which has exceeded levels considered safe for hundreds of thousands of pregnancies over the past several years.

NIEHS also supports the Collaborative Children's Environmental Health Research and Translation (CEHRT) Centers. Researchers in each of the six Centers translate key children's environmental health research findings into tools, strategies, and interventions that can be used or adapted by those working to protect children's health, such as healthcare practitioners, policymakers, child care providers, schools, community leaders, and families. They partner with community-based organizations to improve and protect children's health, with an intentional focus on disadvantaged communities.

Disaster preparedness: Researchers funded by NIEHS enhance our response to and recovery from natural disasters. For example, the Disaster Research Response Resources Portal (DR2) provides researchers and the public with resources and tools to design studies in partnership with communities and rapidly translate research results into actionable interventions. For congregate settings such as schools for children, these places must be addressed promptly in the context of disaster preparedness to enable them to stay open longer and safely to minimize future learning losses.

Endocrine disrupting chemicals: NIEHS-funded research teams have led the way in advancing our understanding of how chemicals that interfere with the normal function of hormones and endocrine systems, also known as endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) can cause adverse health effects. New scientific knowledge on EDCs has established that these chemicals may have nontraditional dose response curves, developmental effects with long-term consequences, and unique effects at low doses due to the sensitive nature of the endocrine system. NIEHS supported scientists have helped shape our understanding of how EDCs may impact reproductive health and fertility in both men and women.

Community engagement: Finally, NIEHS is recognized for its unique ability to engage societies and translate research findings to community-level interventions. The NIEHS Environmental

Health Sciences Core Center Program includes Community Engagement Cores that facilitate communication between research teams and community representatives to ensure that research goals meet the needs of the people impacted by chemical exposures. The educational resources and other materials developed by these cores often are useful beyond the communities for which they were developed, helping improve knowledge at other sites with similar concerns.

Congress Must Protect NIH to Ensure Funds are Spent as Intended

Our coalition appreciates that funding for biomedical research has been a longstanding bipartisan priority. However, we are extremely concerned about policies and processes that have prevented NIEHS and NIH from efficiently spending funds and supporting meritorious research grants as intended by Congress. We are grateful that the Committee included language in FY 2026 to limit the total amount of funds NIH may obligate for more than one year under multi-year awards. We respectfully urge the Committee to maintain this guardrail in FY 2027 by continuing to hold multi-year obligations at or below the prior year's level, so that NIEHS can sustain new and competing awards and retain flexibility to address emerging environmental health risks.

Unilateral Restructuring May Disrupt Important Priorities

Our coalition is also concerned about proposals to restructure NIH without a formal authorizing process, including hearings, from Congress. We are particularly concerned about the President's proposal to relocate NIEHS into a consolidated office within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) without describing how NIEHS' programs and strategic research goals would be preserved in the new structure. Research supported by NIEHS plays a unique and important role that is not easily incorporated into other agencies' work. Moreover, as a component institute of the NIH, NIEHS has the ability to collaborate across ICs to ensure that environmental health research priorities are captured in trans-agency projects and cohort studies, while also providing appropriate input on the goals and objectives of individual ICs. Such collaboration ensures that all biological systems and disease areas can incorporate environmental health research to better understand disease prevention and treatment. We also note that the fundamental goals of NIEHS, while complementary to other agencies, centers, and offices, benefit from being part of NIH due to the focus on fundamental biological discovery and developing new knowledge related to health hazards associated with environmental exposures. Critically, NIEHS focuses on the entire breadth of environmental health, not only 'toxins', and we are concerned that these other research objectives would be lost in the new structure.

Any change to an agency like NIH, which provides funding to all 50 states and supports complex long-term research priorities, should involve forums for stakeholder input, including but not limited to scientists, patients, institutions, and civil society groups. Congress should ensure that changes to the NIH organization and structure have a scientific and policy rationale through the authorization process.

Intramural Support is Critical

While the majority of funds appropriated to NIEHS fund research around the country, our coalition also notes the important role of the intramural program at NIEHS and the excellent track record of discoveries made by intramural scientists. Clinical research done at the NIEHS campus has helped us understand how obesity may influence pubertal timing in girls. Basic scientists at NIEHS are also using artificial intelligence based methods to better understand why

some cancers are resistant to drugs. We urge Congress to ensure that these and other critical programs at NIEHS can continue consistent with review by the Board of Scientific Counselors.

More Funding Needed for NIH and NIEHS in FY 2027

In conclusion, to ensure that NIEHS-funded researchers are able to continue to advance research in support of the Nation's public health priorities, the Friends of NIEHS recommend that the Subcommittee provide at least \$996 million for NIEHS in FY2027 as part of an overall appropriation for NIH of \$51.3 billion in the FY 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.