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March 16, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
347 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0703

The Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
2207 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3604

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chair DeLauro, and
Ranking Member Cole:

On behalf of the Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR), I am writing to urge you to provide renewed and sustained investment in scientific and medical research within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as part of the fiscal year (FY) 2022 appropriations process. Specifically, we wish to draw your attention to areas of crucial need for women's health in FY 2022.

SWHR is dedicated to promoting research on biological sex differences in disease and improving women's health through science, policy, and education. For over 30 years, SWHR has brought attention to diseases and conditions that disproportionately or differently impact women. As women comprise over half of our nation's population, it is in our best interest to appropriately and adequately fund a federal research agenda inclusive of women's health and sex differences

research. Outlined below are the appropriations priorities that SWHR is advocating for in FY 2022.

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)

As America's premier medical research agency and the largest public funder of biomedical and behavioral research in the world, the NIH is vital to the overall health and well-being of Americans. By fostering creative discoveries and innovative research, training and supporting researchers to ensure continued scientific progress, and expanding the scientific and medical knowledge base, the NIH is in a unique and significant position to achieve medical breakthroughs that will improve women's health and well-being broadly.

To sustain and bolster its funding through competitive grants to researchers across the United States and around the world as well as support the work of researchers within the NIH, **SWHR requests that Congress provides, at a minimum, at least \$46.1 billion for the NIH**, a \$3.2 billion increase over current funding.

We respectfully request that the following NIH-related language be included in the accompanying report to the FY 2022 Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Bill:

Diversity of the Biomedical Research Workforce. – The Committee is concerned with the impact of COVID-19 on the diversity of the biomedical research workforce, particularly women and women of color early stage and midcareer investigators. The Committee directs NIH to study the race and gender breakdown of the impact of COVID on participation in the workforce by monitoring the types of awards applied for and granted by gender and race for two years. If the data demonstrate that less women are applying for grants, then it is imperative that NIH take steps to address this disparity. The Committee requests a status update from NIH on this research in the FY 2023 Congressional Justification as well as the steps being taken to maintain the diversity of the research workforce.

Analyzing Sex Differences and Long-Term Health Effects of COVID-19 – The Committee recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed an array of related health disparities, including a difference in severity and outcomes between female and male patients due to sex and gender influences. This is also true for individuals who continue to experience COVID-19 symptoms and/or damage to organs to varying degrees months after their initial diagnosis. To better understand how sex differences are implicated in the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee encourages the Institutes and Centers of the NIH in coordination with the NIH Office of the Director and Office of Women's Health Research to support research that studies how sex as a biological variable impacts short and long-term outcomes due to infection with SARS-CoV-2.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

The NICHD has achieved extraordinary feats in research on women's health throughout the lifecycle and has provided a home for women's health research in areas such as reproductive sciences; maternal, child, and family health; and population health. Given the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continuing rise in health disparities for women across their lifespan, it is crucial that NICHD has adequate and sustained resources to build upon new and existing initiatives, to address

knowledge gaps, and to identify solutions that benefit women, children, and families throughout the U.S. **SWHR requests that Congress provides, at a minimum, at least \$1.7 billion for the NICHD,** a \$117.7 million increase over current funding.

We respectfully request that the following NICHD-related language be included in the accompanying report to the FY 2022 Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Bill:

Uterine Fibroids. – Nationally, an estimated 26 million individuals ages 15 to 50 have diagnosed uterine fibroids. Uterine fibroids are the most common gynecological condition, but individuals are frequently unaware that the symptoms of this condition — including heavy menstrual bleeding, pain, and frequent urination during periods — are abnormal. Fibroids contribute to significant negative health outcomes including chronic pain, iron deficiency and anemia, miscarriage, and/or infertility. The Committee strongly urges the NICHD to prioritize funding to expand basic, clinical, and translational research into the mechanics of fibroids, identification of early diagnostic methods, and fertility-preserving treatments. Research focusing on understanding the significant health disparities among individuals with fibroids should also be prioritized, given that Black women are at increased risk for fibroids, tend to develop symptoms at a younger age, and suffer more severe symptoms.

Pregnant and Lactating Individuals. – The Committee includes \$1,500,000 for the NICHD to contract with the NASEM to convene a panel with specific legal, ethical, regulatory, and policy expertise to develop a framework for addressing medicolegal and liability issues when planning or conducting research specific to pregnant people and lactating people. Specifically, this panel should include individuals with ethical and legal expertise in clinical trials and research; regulatory expertise; plaintiffs' attorneys; pharmaceutical representatives with tort liability and research expertise; insurance industry representatives; federally funded researchers who work with pregnant and lactating women; representatives of institutional review boards (IRBs); and health policy experts.

Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH)

As the NIH focal point for coordinating women's health research, ORWH strengthens research related to diseases, disorders, and conditions that affect women's health and ensures that women are appropriately represented in biomedical and behavioral research supported by the NIH. Because of the breadth and scope of women's health research throughout the NIH, ORWH requires adequate and sustained funding to continue these initiatives and to support established scientists across the country who are conducting groundbreaking research that integrates basic, clinical, and behavioral research approaches to incorporate sex and gender differences.

We respectfully request that the following ORWH-related language be included in the accompanying report to the FY 2022 Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Bill:

Office of Research on Women's Health Funding. – The Committee recommends \$55,400,000 for the Office of Research on Women's Health. This office ensures women's health research and research on the biological and sociocultural influence of sex and gender are included within the larger National



Institutes of Health scientific framework. Congress recognizes that ORWH is the first public health service office to officially promote women's health research within and beyond the NIH scientific community. ORWH provides critical leadership to develop research programs like Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health (BIRCWH), an initiative that aims to increase the number and skills of investigators who conduct research on sex and gender influences on health and disease, and the Specialized Centers of Research Excellence (SCORE), a program designed to expedite the development and application of new knowledge to human diseases that affect women, to learn more about the etiology of these diseases, and to foster improved approaches to treatment and/or prevention.

BIRCWH Fellows Program. – The Committee allocates \$3 million to the ORWH's Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health (BIRCWH) program to fund additional BIRCWH fellows at all existing sites with a goal of increasing the diversity of the scholars, sites, and research areas supported by the program. These funds would support additional researchers focused on women's health and sex differences, which are priority research areas, as well as expand the program's work in the reproductive sciences. The Committee recognizes the effectiveness of the BIRCWH program, which is a mentored career-development program designed to connect junior faculty and senior faculty with shared interests.

Thank you in advance for consideration of SWHR's FY 2022 funding recommendations for the NIH. For far too long, women were excluded and overlooked in biomedical research. It is important to ensure that a focused and strategic effort is made to further research initiatives that will result in improved and optimal health of women throughout their lives.

If you have questions, please contact Melissa Laitner, PhD, MPH, Director of Public Policy & Government Affairs, at melissa@swhr.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathryn G. Schubert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kathryn G. Schubert, MPP
President and Chief Executive Officer
Society for Women's Health Research