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April 7, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Leahy, Chairwoman DeLauro, Vice Chairman Shelby, and Ranking Member Granger,

The American Academy of Neurology (AAN), the world's largest neurology specialty society representing over 36,000 neurologists and clinical neuroscience professionals, is strongly committed to improving the care and outcomes of persons with neurologic illness by advancing understanding of the brain and nervous system through medical research.

The AAN applauds your past strong support of investing in life-saving treatments and cures for neurologic disease. We encourage Congress to pass a Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies FY 2022 appropriations bill that provides robust, sustained funding for medical research and care, including:

- \$46.11 billion for the National Institutes of Health
- \$560 million for the BRAIN Initiative
- \$500 million for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

We also encourage Congress to pass a Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies FY 2022 appropriations bill that includes:

- Increased investment to maintain and expand Neurology Centers of Excellence for Veterans
- \$902 million for the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program

National Institutes of Health

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the world's leading funder of basic biomedical research, providing vital discoveries that can help lead to treatments and cures for neurologic diseases. Decades of basic, translational, and clinical research are necessary to develop lifesaving therapies. The NIH is also vital in helping us understand the long-term effects of COVID-19. For example, the NIH's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke recently launched

NeuroCOVID, a new database to collect information about COVID-19 related neurologic symptoms, complications, and outcomes as well as the virus' effects on existing neurologic conditions. To further realize the potential of neurology-related NIH research and to continue this forward momentum, the AAN requests the NIH receives at least \$46.11 billion in FY 2022.

BRAIN Initiative

The AAN has supported the BRAIN Initiative since its inception in 2013 and recognizes the utmost importance of developing a deeper knowledge about the brain to treat neurologic disease more effectively. This multidisciplinary collaboration involving public and private partners is working to map circuits of the brain, measure electrical and chemical activity, and understand how their interplay creates unique cognitive and behavioral capabilities. Numerous AAN members currently conduct research funded by the BRAIN Initiative and appreciate the grant program's unique prioritization of innovation. For example, one BRAIN Initiative grant-funded study identified the neurons responsible for affecting behavior that can cause tremors. This is the first time these neurons have been identified in humans, and has the potential to lead to more targeted treatment through deep brain stimulation for individuals with Parkinson's disease.

Congress has steadily increased funding to ensure the success of this program. Now that the BRAIN Initiative has been funded for several years, the NIH and its partners are committed to propelling the Initiative to a new era of transparency, data sharing, dissemination, public engagement, and neuroethics. The BRAIN Initiative plans to launch three large new projects including a brain cell census, a brain micro connectivity mapping project, and new methods to allow cell type-based manipulation of brain activity. To date, the BRAIN Initiative has supported more than 900 awards totaling approximately \$1.8 billion, resulting in research that has made significant advances in important technologies such as brain imaging.

Funding for the BRAIN Initiative is supported in part by funds to the NIH Innovation Account which was created by the 21st Century Cures Act. For FY 2022, the NIH Innovation Account designates \$152 million for the BRAIN Initiative. In keeping with the original intent to fully fund this program, we request that at least a total of \$560 million be appropriated to the program in FY 2022.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

The AAN encourages Congress to continue its support for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) as an independent agency. AHRQ is the only federal agency that funds holistic research on health systems including patients, technology, and providers. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, AHRQ awarded 28 research grants to study changes in health care delivery due to the pandemic spanning issues including telehealth, emergency management, and rural health care. We ask Congress to provide \$500 million in appropriations for AHRQ in FY 2022 to continue important patient safety and quality projects.

VA Neurology Centers of Excellence

Nine million Veterans are enrolled in VA care around the nation, including many who suffer from neurologic disease. Many of these Veterans benefit from the unique care of neurology-related Centers of Excellence, centers that are fully integrated into a VA medical center to better coordinate multidisciplinary care and specifically address epilepsy, headache, Parkinson's disease, and multiple sclerosis.

Unfortunately, these centers have faced stagnant funding, some for two decades, despite a growing need for neurologic care for Veterans. The AAN, along with the Epilepsy Foundation, National MS Society, Michael J. Fox Foundation, and Alliance for Headache Disorders Advocacy, ask Congress to express its ongoing support for the Neurology Centers of Excellence in FY 2022 appropriations report language. Suggested report language:

Neurology Centers of Excellence. — The Committee recognizes the increasing number of Veterans affected by neurologic conditions, including but not limited to: epilepsy, headache, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease. The Department is directed to significantly increase its investment to maintain and expand existing centers of excellence within the VA dedicated to these conditions to enhance their value in coordinating innovative clinical care, education, and research efforts. No later than 120 days after enactment of this Act the Committee directs the Secretary to submit a report to the Committees providing details on opportunities to enhance care for veterans with neurologic conditions, including potential collaboration between the neurology centers of excellence.

VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program

The AAN urges Congress to support medical research at the Department of Veterans Affairs, given the disproportionate impact of neurologic conditions on Veterans such as traumatic brain injuries. Increased funding for VA research would allow for new efforts to address COVID-19, health disparities, and access to clinical trials, while renewing support for groundbreaking programs like the Million Veteran Program and research on neurologic disease. We ask Congress to provide \$902 million in appropriations for the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program to improve Veterans' health and well-being.


Other Programs

The AAN also encourages Congress to support the following programs that benefit neurologists and their patients:

- The National Neurological Conditions Surveillance System at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- The Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs at the Department of the Defense
- Firearm morbidity and mortality prevention research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- The Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL) Initiative at the National Institutes of Health, including \$50 million dedicated specifically to headache disorder research

We appreciate your consideration of our funding requests and thank you for your ongoing commitment to medical research. If you have any questions or requests for additional information, please contact Derek Brandt, AAN's Director, Congressional Affairs, at dbrandt@aan.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James C. Stevens MD." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James C. Stevens, MD, FAAN
President, American Academy of Neurology

cc:

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Senate Majority Leader

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House

The Honorable Steny Hoyer, House Majority Leader

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, House Minority Leader

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education

The Honorable Martin Heinrich, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

The Honorable John Boozman, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education

The Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

The Honorable John Carter, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies