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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

November 10th, 2008

Raynard S. Kington, MD, Ph.D
Acting Director
National Institutes of Health
US Department of Health and Human Services

Dear Dr. Kington,

Congratulations on your appointment as Acting Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We have no doubt that you will provide excellent stewardship for the nation's premiere health research agency. Your past leadership of the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research is evidence of your valuable insight into important issues, such as the need for scientific leadership for basic behavioral research.

We therefore want to take this opportunity to engage you on basic behavioral science research at NIH. We first met to discuss this issue with you in 2003, and on your advice we agreed to a study assessing the needs for this science at both NIH and at the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS). At the time we had been considering legislation to make this happen without a study, but we decided instead to allow the NIH process to run its course, with the agreement that the NIH would adhere to the study's conclusions. The 2004 report, written by a NIH-selected blue ribbon Working Group, concluded that basic behavioral research requires a stable home at NIH, and that NIGMS fits this bill. This recommendation was approved by the NIH Advisory Committee and given to the Director, but the Director decided not to implement it. In 2006, the majority of the original Working Group members re-wrote their original conclusions with additional support, emphasizing that the issue had become more important given the fact the NIMH has focused its portfolio on more clinical science. Since then, we and others in both the House and the Senate have called for additional action, including for a FY 2008 report detailing a strategic plan for behavior science. None of these actions, however, have satisfied the original recommendation, and a field of research critical to our nation's health has been left stranded.

Among other things, the Working Group concurred with multiple recommendations of Congress, the Institute of Medicine, and the National Academies of Science, so we are disappointed that NIH has not implemented them. We held off on more directive action when we met in 2003 to allow for the study's completion. As the study is now complete, we urge you to implement these recommendations.

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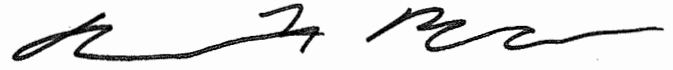
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We look forward to hearing from you what the next steps will be toward fulfilling this need, in accordance with all applicable rules and regulations. Thank you for your continued responsiveness and your leadership.


Patrick J. Kennedy
Member of Congress

Sincerely,


Brian Baird
Member of Congress