November 19, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President-elect
Biden/Harris Transition Team
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-elect Biden:

I would like to congratulate you on your electoral victory that will make you the 46th President of the United States.

The American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB) is a professional society of more than 6,000 basic biomedical researchers in all 50 states and over 60 countries around the world. We are pleased to call more than 35 Nobel Laureates among our members during their careers. As you make preparations for your administration and then begin to lead our country, the ASCB and its members stand ready to help in any way we can.

As you discussed many times during the recent campaign, many of the issues facing our country at this time could benefit from a strong reliance in science. Obviously, the national response to the current COVID-19 pandemic would have significantly improved if decisions had been based on science and not on other factors. We are pleased that one of your first actions as President-elect was to convene a working group of highly respected clinicians, scientists, and former government health leaders to propose a framework for dealing with the virus.

As you may be aware, many of the policies proposed by the current administration are having significant negative impact on the American biomedical research community and put at risk the continued international leadership of the American biomedical research community. We ask you to seriously consider revoking these policies as you begin your Administration. Issues of concern include the following:

**Cutting Edge Biomedical Research**

For the last four years, the Trump Administration has worked vigorously to eliminate federal support for several areas of cutting edge biomedical research. In June of 2019, the White House halted all research using human fetal tissue by government scientists and announced the creation of an
ethics advisory board to review the ethics of U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH)-approved and scientifically meritorious NIH funded research grants. After a year of waiting, 15 NIH-approved grants were reviewed by the Trump ethics board, and only 1 of the 15 previously-approved grants received a recommendation for funding. Human fetal tissue is used in a wide array of research including the development of vaccines against polio, rubella, measles, chickenpox, adenovirus, rabies, and treatments for debilitating diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, cystic fibrosis, and hemophilia. Fetal tissue was also essential for the development of a therapy to prevent the transmission of HIV. It remains critical for ongoing clinical research on potential treatments for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), spinal cord injury, Parkinson’s disease, and human development. The importance of these cells for research has recently become even more pressing. They have been instrumental developing COVID-19 therapies including the antiviral drug Remdesivir and the monoclonal antibody cocktail received by President Trump. This ethics board serves as a severe road block for important research and the development of important treatments and cures. We ask that the Fetal Tissue Ethics Review Board be terminated, and federal scientists be allowed, once again, to use this important research tool. It is important that NIH peer review once again be the process that decides which research is eligible for funding by the NIH.

We remain concerned that in the closing days of this administration, they will take steps to halt two other areas of biomedical research. Human embryonic stem cells and humanized mice are critical tools of biomedical science that have been under attack for the last four years. Research using human embryonic stem cells, which benefited from the March, 2009 Obama/Biden Administration Executive Order which opened the door to federal support for human embryonic stem cell research, has been one of the biomedical research areas listed for attack. Humanized mice, the important research tool most people have never heard about, are research mice with functioning human genes and/or cells and are commonly used as animal models to test research during the search for human therapeutics. These small animals are useful to medical science beyond their size and should be protected from ideologically-based policy making. This important research tool has also been on the anti-science cancellation wish list.

**Immigration**

Our continued world scientific leadership means more than national pride and is, in fact, a large contributor to our nation’s economic success. Students and young scientists from all over the world come to the United States to learn from the best scientists in the world. During their education, they help make our research community even better. Often, these scientists decide to stay in the United States at the conclusion of their studies, adding more to the U.S. research enterprise, particularly our great research universities, many of which are the best in the world. This combination of the best researchers at the best universities has attracted the biotech and pharmaceutical industry to our shores. This troika of researchers, institutions, and industry make the U.S. the leader in biomedical research.

For the past year, the Trump Administration has been using the U.S. visa system to level attacks on scientists from other nations who are here in the United States. While these policies have been advertised as protecting us from “them,” in reality the victim of these policies is the United States. Superb scientists from other countries are already deciding it’s just not worth the hassle to come to or stay in the United States. Instead, they are searching out other nations to study in and in the process are making the science in those nations better. It is the U.S. that will suffer. Without these top notch scientists from around the world, our research community will not be the leading
community it is now. We ask that these immigration Executive Orders, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions and other federal government policies be overturned.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
Several recent policy decisions by the Trump White House will all but stop efforts to combat race and sex discrimination within federal government agencies and prohibit federal grantees, including grantees who work to combat this discrimination in the scientific community, from receiving funding to educate and raise public awareness. Executive Order 13950 and OMB memos M-20-34 and M-20-37 need to be revoked as soon as possible.

The ASCB stands ready to work with you on behalf of the American biomedical research community. Should the members of the Transition Team or relevant Landing Teams have any questions or wish to know more about our concerns, please contact Kevin Wilson, ASCB’s Director of Public Policy and Media Relations at kwilson@ascb.org.

Sincerely,

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