



Genetics Society of America
Celebrating 75 Years

9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20814-3998
Phone: (301) 634-7300 · fax (301) 634-7079
e-mail: society@genetics-gsa.org
www.genetics-gsa.org

January 28, 2011

Lawrence A. Tabak, DDS, PhD
Principal Deputy Director
National Institutes of Health

Alan E. Guttmacher, MD
Director
Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of
Child Health and Human Development

Dear Drs. Tabak and Guttmacher:

The Genetics Society of America (GSA) would like to share its views on the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) Task Force Straw Model presented on the NIH website on January 16, 2011.

Specifically, the GSA would like to comment on the transfer of the Comparative Models programs of the Division of Comparative Medicine (DCM) in NCRR to the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS). The GSA represents more than 4,000 geneticists in North America and internationally, the large majority of whom rely on the model organism stock centers and other resources supported by these programs.

We agree that, in the wake of NCRR's demise, NIGMS is an appropriate home for the DCM. As NIGMS is being asked to undertake the provision of crucial tools for basic research in genetics, we ask that the following be considered carefully.

1. We request that full funding for the stock centers be added to the NIGMS budget, so that the program will continue at current levels, with appropriate increases in ensuing years. The long term and consistent support of stock centers by NCRR has been a crucial component of the strength and success of biomedical research in the US, and assures its future vigor. As a measure of this success, in the past 10 years, Nobel prizes have been awarded to eight GSA members for their work in model organism research.

- Centralized stock centers provide optimal resource sharing that maximizes the return on the investments made by NIH, particularly through RO1-supported, investigator-initiated research.
- The centers are cost effective, providing access to "off-the-shelf" research tools and thus increasing the efficiency and rapidity of hypothesis driven, investigator-initiated research supported by NIH RO1 grants.
- NIH support for the stock centers allows them to operate on an open access model, thus assuring that all researchers have the tools they need for discovery.

- The stock centers serve to preserve strains of research model organisms that have been generated by RO1-funded efforts.

2. We request that the key staff members at DCM who have overseen the model organism stock centers remain with the program as the program moves to NIGMS. This will optimize the oversight of the stock centers program.

- The oversight of stock centers benefits from clustering projects, and from the specialized expertise and institutional memory of program managers within the current NCRR Division of Comparative Medicine.
- Both the needs of stock centers and the stock center funding mechanisms are highly specialized.
- By keeping these projects together under a single division, best practices can be readily implemented across stock centers.
- The evaluation of stock centers uses very different criteria than that used to evaluate research grant applications. Stock centers are judged by the effectiveness with which they support research communities, rather than the novelty or impact of discoveries.

-

The importance of NCRR to the genetics community cannot be overstated, and the GSA will continue to engage with the NCRR Task Force as these plans move forward.

Sincerely,
Paul Sternberg, PhD
President, Genetics Society of America
Department of Biology
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena California

Cc: Francis Collins, MD, Director, NIH
Jeremy Berg, Ph.D., Director, NIGMS