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ROCKVILLE, MD – Nearly one month ago, the National Institutes of Health took the unusual step of revoking a peer-reviewed research grant awarded in June 2019. The grant, which focused on how coronaviruses can be transferred from their natural hosts to humans, became the target of criticism from President Donald Trump because of the investigator’s collaboration with experts in China.

Today, 31 scientific societies representing hundreds of thousands of scientists – led by the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology – sent a letter to NIH Director Francis S. Collins calling for transparency about the decision-making process and for the NIH to reconsider its decision. In the letter, the groups argue that revocation of the grant is “counterintuitive, given the urgent need to better understand the virus that causes COVID-19 and identify drugs that will save lives.” It also says “it politicizes science at a time when, if we are to stamp out this scourge, we need the public to trust experts and to take collective action.”

This effort is being led by Benjamin Corb, public affairs director for the ASBMB, who says, “Our aim with this effort is to stand up for a scientific enterprise that should be free of political influence on sound scientific research. This grant was peer reviewed, led to research that has numerous publications in scholarly journals, and was competitively renewed just last year.”

Corb continues, “The continued politicization of science during this pandemic crisis is an alarming trend that is risking not only the integrity of science, but also the lives of citizens. Scientific research must remain clear of the partisanship that divides the nation and must be the foundation for sound policymaking during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.”

A copy of the letter can be found here: https://www.asbmb.org/getmedia/dbb22a26-ee0f-45e5-a1ed-13af91275f07/Support-Science-Sign-on-Letter_1.pdf

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