

July 17, 2002

The Honorable Dick Arme
Chairman, House Select Committee
On Homeland Security
301 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We join with the President, the American people, the Congress and you in agreeing that homeland security is our nation's top priority. The scientific community is concerned that transferring research funding and decision-making authority from the Department of Health and Human Services to the new Department of Homeland Security could have the unintended effect of frustrating and fragmenting our nation's ability to provide the biomedical research that is needed to respond effectively to future bioterrorism threats and immediate emergencies.

The 60,000 scientist-members of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) are convinced that basic research on a wide range of infectious agents, not only those classified as Category A Select Agents, is most likely to lead to important breakthroughs that are applicable to the fight against bioterrorism. The Department of Health and Human Services and the NIH have already incorporated the knowledge of experts in infectious disease, immunology and vaccine development to devise a strategic plan for biodefense research. The transfer of the HHS/NIAID bioterror research portfolio to the Department of Homeland Security would delay crucial research and potentially forestall the implementation of NIAID's strategic plan.

The NIH and its parent department, HHS, historically have set biomedical research priorities for our nation. While it is necessary and appropriate for the Department of Homeland Security to play a role in consulting on research priorities, priority setting should continue to be done by the scientific experts at HHS and NIH. We therefore urge the House Select Committee to adopt Section 303 (attached) as passed on a bipartisan basis by the House Energy and Commerce Committee last Thursday. This Committee has set the correct policy to ensure that research in the fight against bioterrorism is planned, carried out and implemented as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Steven L. Teitelbaum, M.D.