



FASEB

Federation of American Societies
for Experimental Biology

Representing Over 130,000 Researchers

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www.faseb.org

9650 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20814

March 4, 2019

Francis S. Collins, MD, PhD
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Transmitted electronically via email: francis.collins@nih.gov

Dear Dr. Collins,

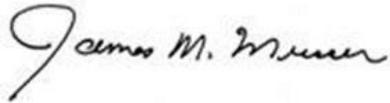
The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) applauds the statement issued by you and other members of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH's) leadership team acknowledging a need for the agency to be more proactive in addressing gender and sexual harassment in research and training environments. As the most prominent funder of biomedical research, NIH has the opportunity to set the tone regarding what behaviors will and will not be tolerated. The statement issued on February 28, 2019 demonstrates a commitment to utilize this opportunity to proactively address the factors that enable harassment to take place.

Although we were pleased with NIH's clear proclamation to serve as a standard-bearer regarding acceptable behaviors among the grantee community, FASEB is concerned about the mechanism allowing individuals to share information or file a complaint via the email address, GranteeHarassment@od.nih.gov. We strongly support the creation of a mechanism by which individuals can directly report an issue to NIH. In fact, we believe that this will aid the agency's awareness of and ability to respond to potential instances of harassment in the biomedical research community. However, the statement does not provide details regarding the privacy of individuals choosing to submit information through this avenue. For instance, it is unclear whether information submitted via this email address will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. If so, have redaction guidelines been established to ensure adequate protection of the identities of individuals both reporting and reported? Without clear parameters regarding how the information is protected and utilized, it is challenging for many organizations, FASEB included, to actively encourage use of this mechanism.

FASEB appreciates NIH's willingness to take a strong stance against gender and sexual harassment in research environments and to accept the critical role it plays in changing the

culture. We recognize that this was just an initial statement, but taken at face value it generates many questions including the privacy issue noted above. Therefore, we encourage you to actively engage the stakeholder community – as you have done many times on topics ranging from research workforce to data sharing – to further clarify this strategy to ensure appropriate privacy protections while also demonstrating your commitment to “do better.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James M. Musser". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James M. Musser, MD, PhD
FASEB President

Cc: Lawrence A. Tabak, DDS, PhD
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