April 27, 2015

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) would like to express its opposition to the “Secret Science Reform Act of 2015” (S 544), a bill that will be considered by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee this week. As a federation of 27 scientific and engineering societies, representing more than 120,000 biomedical researchers, we clearly understand and support the principle that federal regulations must be based on sound science. We are, however, concerned that the language of the proposed legislation is so broad that it could be used to prevent the implementation of nearly any regulation by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and, by precedent, lead to similar restrictions on other agencies. We agree that federal agencies should base regulations on sound science. However, we are concerned that this legislation will not increase transparency, and is, in fact, duplicative of existing policies.

According to a March 9, 2009 Memorandum from the White House on the subject of Scientific Integrity, “when scientific or technological information is considered in policy decisions, the information should be subject to well-established scientific processes.” Additionally, under Section (d), unless information is prevented from being disclosed by statute or other regulation, “an agency should make available to the public the scientific or technological findings or conclusions considered or relied on in policy decisions.” In accordance with this Memorandum, the EPA has its own Scientific Integrity Policy. As the policy notes, the EPA is in compliance with the 2002 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Information Quality Guidelines, the 2005 OMB Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, the EPA’s Quality Policy for assuring the collection and use of sound scientific data, and the EPA’s Information Quality Guidelines for establishing the transparency, integrity, and utility of information used and published by the agency. This extensive and comprehensive set of regulations more than ensures that the science upon which EPA bases regulations is of the highest technical merit, transparent, and reproducible.

Steps to enhance transparency across all disciplines of science are already underway at several other federal agencies. For instance, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is developing a training module for graduate students to enhance experimental design to increase the reproducibility and transparency of research findings. Funding agencies, including NIH and the National Science Foundation, require inclusion of data management plans as part of the grant.
application. These efforts enhance work already being done by the agencies to ensure the transparency, availability, and reproducibility of data produced by federally-funded research. As working scientists, we are dedicated to the open distribution of our work, much of which is funded by federal agencies that require dissemination, including the EPA, NIH, the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy. We are equally committed to seeing that our research results contribute to the good of the Nation, including the quality of its environment and the health of its people. Establishing unreasonably broad and burdensome requirements for the implementation of already well-supported regulations, as the “Secret Science Reform Act” appears to do, could weaken the scientific foundations of government policy, contrary to the stated goals of the bill.

For these reasons, FASEB opposes the “Secret Science Reform Act” in its current form.

Sincerely,

Joseph R. Haywood, PhD
FASEB President