July 11, 2018

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA), we respectfully urge you to adopt the Senate-passed Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical and Prosthetic Research appropriation of $779 million for FY 2019. While this amount falls short of the $823 million recommended by FOVA, it will help offset the potential cuts to designated VA research areas caused by chronic underfunding and new budget stressors.

FOVA appreciates that report language accompanying the House bill calls for additional research specifically related to PTSD, TBI, respiratory diseases, cancer research and clinical trials access, intergenerational effects of toxic exposure, prosthetics for females and other specialized prosthetics, neuromuscular junction regeneration research, post-deployment integrated care, and the Million Veteran Program (MVP). However, the House-approved funding level would result in no new projects in the following designated research areas, as identified in the FY 2019 VA Congressional Budget Justification:

- Acute & Traumatic Injury
- Aging
- Cancer
- Central Nervous System Injury & Associated Disorders
- Degenerative Diseases of Bones & Joints
- Dementia & Neuronal Degeneration
- Diabetes & Major Complications
- Digestive Diseases
- Gulf War Research Illness
- Health Systems
- Heart Disease
- Infectious Disease
- Kidney Disorders
- Lung Disorders
- Military Occupations & Environmental Exposures
- Prosthetics
- Sensory Loss

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Additionally, the Administration’s budget requests funding for four new areas, totaling an additional $87.4 million for FY 2019: 1) biomedical research and development price index; 2) backup biorepository for MVP samples; 3) Secretary’s priority areas of mental health, pain management, prosthetics, and MVP; and 4) a collaboration with the Department of Energy (DOE). With only a $10 million increase over the FY 2018 funding level, the House bill would cause the VA to fall short of achieving these goals or necessitate cuts in other priority research areas. While the House report references $27 million for the VA/DOE collaboration and $40 million for PTSD, the funding bill is asking the VA research program to do more with insufficient funds.

Despite the documented success of VA investigators across many fields, appropriated funding for VA research has lagged far behind annual biomedical research inflation, resulting in near flat-funding since 2010. FOVA believes additional resources are necessary to expand research on emerging conditions prevalent among newer veterans, as well as to continue the VA’s inquiries into chronic conditions of aging veterans from previous wartime periods.

Thank you for your continued support of VA research. We hope the impact of VA research funding shortfalls outlined above demonstrates the need for at least the Senate’s $779 million VA Medical and Prosthetic Research appropriation.

Sincerely,

The FOVA Executive Committee

cc: House and Senate members of the FY 2019 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill conference committee:

Rep. Mike Simpson          Senator Richard Shelby
Rep. Ken Calvert           Senator John Boozman
Rep. Jeff Fortenberry      Senator Steve Daines
Rep. Charles Fleischmann   Senator James Lankford
Rep. Scott Taylor          Senator Dianne Feinstein
Rep. Nita Lowey            Senator Brian Schatz
Rep. Marcy Kaptur          Senator Chris Murphy
Rep. Peter Visclosky       
Rep. Tim Ryan               
Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz