



ADVANCING SCIENCE, SERVING SOCIETY

May 18, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-2803

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1702

Dear Senators Reid and McConnell,

As representatives of U.S. science, engineering, and higher education organizations, we write to you to express our deep concern regarding amendments that were passed in the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act, H.R. 2146) in the House and the 21st Century Postal Service Act (S. 1789) in the Senate, which would place severe restrictions on government employees' abilities to attend meetings and conferences. We represent hundreds of thousands of scientists, engineers, and mathematicians—many of whom work for the federal government—across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Our organizations are predominantly non-profit, 501(c)(3) professional societies with a mandate to advance the progress of scientific and technological research and education. Our organizations realize that goal through the publication of peer-review journals, and by convening large scientific conferences, workshops, lectures, and seminars. The free exchange of scientific ideas and information is crucial to advancing science and innovation, and conferences are a standard mechanism for the transfer of information among scientists and engineers.

We recognize that Congress has a responsibility to prevent wasteful government spending. We are concerned, however, that the language in the amendments would inadvertently impede the free flow of scientific information and the professional development of scientists and engineers. This would potentially work against critical national goals related to national security, public health, science education, innovation, and competitiveness.

Recently, Washington D.C. hosted the 2012 USA Science and Engineering Festival, which engaged 150,000 attendees. Many non-profit scientific and engineering societies participated in the Festival, and almost 40 federal government agencies and offices provided hands-on science exhibits and/or public access to government scientists. It is unclear whether government scientists' participation in this education-oriented activity would then preclude their engagement in any other scientific conference in the same year, under the current amendment language.

The undersigned organizations urge you to protect the integrity of the scientific enterprise and encourage you to allow greater flexibility for government employees to attend scientific and technical conferences organized or supported by professional societies and non-governmental organizations.

American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of Anatomists
American Association for Dental Research
American Association of Immunologists
American Astronomical Society
American Economic Association
American Educational Research Association
American Geophysical Union
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Mathematical Society
American Physiological Society
American Society of Agronomy
American Society for Engineering Education
American Society for Investigative Pathology
American Society of Mammalogists
American Society of Mechanical Engineers
American Society for Microbiology
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
Association of American Geographers
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Biomolecular Resource Facilities
Association for Molecular Pathology
Association of Population Centers
Association for Women in Mathematics
Association for Women in Science
Biophysical Society
Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council of Energy Research and Education Leaders
Council of Environmental Deans and Directors
Crop Science Society of America
Ecological Society of America
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Genetics Society of America
Geological Society of America
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers- USA
Mathematical Association of America
National Council for Science and the Environment
National Postdoctoral Association
Population Association of America
Research!America
The American Federation for Medical Research
The Biomedical Engineering Society
The Optical Society
The Ornithological Council
Society for Neuroscience
Society for the Study of Reproduction
Soil Science Society of America
SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics