April 30, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Merkley:

We, the undersigned academic and research organizations, scientific societies, and stakeholders in environmental science, write to express our gratitude for your continued support of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Science and Technology (S&T) account. As the Subcommittee prepares the fiscal year (FY) 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, we respectfully urge you to continue this vital support by funding the EPA S&T account at $876 million, including $40 million specifically for the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program. We also encourage you to utilize the appropriations process to direct the EPA to enhance innovation within its research function, leveraging the S&T account and the STAR Program to ensure that the EPA has the necessary resources to foster the next generation of environmental leaders and introduce innovative ideas to the agency.

Supporting EPA's Science and Technology Function Benefits U.S. Industry and Public Health
A strong EPA is crucial for protecting Americans' health and supporting U.S. business competitiveness in a global economy. Its science-based research, including the work conducted in partnership with outside institutions, underpins reliable regulations that ensure clean air, water, and soil while fostering a stable business environment. These regulations, based on sound science, provide American businesses with the certainty they need to invest and innovate confidently, knowing that environmental protection requirements are both evidence-based, enforceable, and consistent across state lines. Furthermore, the EPA plays an outsized role in training the next generation of environmental scientists, engineers, and policy experts. Through initiatives such as the STAR program, EPA helps develop the talent pipeline necessary for addressing the complex environmental challenges facing our nation. Such training and workforce development efforts not only bolster the agency's mission but also foster economic opportunities in industries tied to environmental protection and sustainability.

Continued Investment in Research and Development is Necessary
EPA's ability to address increasingly complex environmental challenges has been hampered by staffing shortages and declining research funding. EPA staffing levels are at historic lows and funding for S&T has dropped from a peak of $846 million in FY 2010 to $758.1 million in FY 2024/FY 2025. The STAR program has been underfunded, falling from $138 million in FY 2012 to $28.6 million in recent years. Nonetheless, EPA S&T supported research has profoundly impacted public health, pollution control, and environmental sustainability. The National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) praised EPA's ORD for spurring innovation, stimulating academic research, and developing technologies

to reduce compliance costs for businesses while improving air and water quality.[1,2] EPA's partnerships with outside research institutions are critical to: bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, expand agency research capacity, and contribute to better health outcomes, and lower regulatory costs.

Recommendations for the STAR Program

We were encouraged by the bipartisan support in recent FY 2021-2024 omnibus bills for revitalizing the STAR program, particularly the directives to explore recommendations from NASEM that would make the program more dynamic. Unfortunately, STAR funding remained flat in FY 2024 and FY 2025, limiting EPA's implementation of these much-needed changes. As a result, we urge you to direct $40 million toward STAR within the requested $876 million for EPA S&T. This investment will help implement key priorities, including:

1. **Principal Investigator (PI)-Led Proposals**: Currently, STAR solicits research proposals based on EPA's internal priorities. While this approach ensures alignment with agency needs, it also limits innovation by restricting creative input from external researchers. Allowing for PI-driven proposals would enable researchers to propose novel ideas that may not fit within narrower solicitations but could still meet EPA's mission requirements. This would open the door to breakthrough solutions and expand the pool of eligible applicants, increasing competition and innovation at the agency.
2. **Reestablishment of STAR Graduate Fellowships**: The STAR Graduate Fellowship program, which was eliminated during the Obama administration's STEM education consolidation, served as a critical workforce pipeline for future leaders in environmental health sciences and environmental management while exposing promising students to careers in environmental protection. Reinstating this program would ensure that young researchers receive the support they need to develop relevant expertise, ultimately benefiting both the EPA and U.S. industries reliant on environmental research. NASEM has recognized the unique role of the STAR Graduate Fellowship, noting that no other federal program has stepped in to fill the gap left by its elimination.

Conclusion

Investing in EPA's research functions through the S&T account is a sound investment in the health and prosperity of all Americans, as well as in the global competitiveness of U.S. businesses. As environmental challenges grow more complex, EPA's role in driving scientific research and fostering innovation is crucial. We respectfully ask that you continue to support the EPA's research efforts, including through robust funding for the STAR program, as you prepare the FY 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

We look forward to working with you and are happy to serve as a resource.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Nursing
American Association for Anatomy

[1] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. A Review of the Environmental Protection Agency's Science to Achieve Results Research Program. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/24757

[2] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. Transforming EPA Science to Meet Today's and Tomorrow's Challenges. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/26602.

American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research
American Chemical Society
American Geophysical Union
American Industrial Hygiene Association
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Psychological Association Services Inc.
American Society for Microbiology
Association of Ecosystem Research Centers
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences
Biophysical Society
Boston University
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Duke University
Ecological Society of America
Entomological Society of America
Georgia Institute of Technology
Society for Freshwater Science
Society for Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology
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