



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