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Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer

August 20, 2012

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Whitehouse:

As President of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), I write to express the Association's concerns with two major unintended adverse consequences that may result from the pending Pancreatic Cancer Research and Education Act (PCREA; H.R.733 and S.362). While we share the goal of speeding advances in the diagnosis, treatment, and cure of this devastating disease, the AAMC believes this legislation may have the unfortunate effect of obstructing such progress, not only for pancreatic cancer, but other cancers and diseases as well.

The AAMC is a not-for-profit association representing all 138 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; nearly 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems, including 51 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and nearly 90 academic and scientific societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC represents 128,000 faculty members, 75,000 medical students, and 110,000 resident physicians.

The legislation would require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish a 13-member Interdisciplinary Pancreatic Cancer Coordinating Committee, with only a single member from the National Cancer Institute (NCI). This committee would have responsibility for setting research strategies, defining budgetary needs, appointing a peer review committee to evaluate and prioritize research grant applications, and recommending for exception funding pancreatic cancer applications that fall short of the institute's "payline."

The AAMC is deeply concerned about the adverse impact of creating an entirely new review structure and process outside of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to allocate NCI funds. This independent authority to prioritize and award grants would bypass and disrupt the NIH-wide merit review system, which has been the foundation for a research enterprise that has transformed the biosciences and the practice of medicine, and is the envy of the rest of the world. The legislation also would limit the input of the NCI Director and his staff in defining the overall research priorities of the institute and coordinating NCI's efforts with those of the other NIH Institutes and Centers. The AAMC believes this proposal would not only add bureaucracy – by creating a parallel resource allocation and priority setting structure and process – but would also

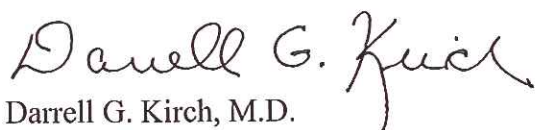
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set a precedent that will likely encourage other disease groups to call for similar committees outside of the NIH. This would undermine NIH's merit review process, which engages the world's leading scientists to ensure the highest quality of research is advanced, and would further fragment the nation's research effort.

A second concern with this legislation is that the narrow scope and separate authority of the Coordinating Committee would serve to isolate pancreatic cancer research from the remarkable advances being made not only with other cancers but across the spectrum of medical research. The ability to build upon the progress in one disease or area of research to inform others is especially crucial for the most complex and deadly diseases, such as pancreatic cancer. Recently, a distinguished panel from the National Academy of Sciences asserted that our understanding of health and disease would grow deeper and faster by integrating our knowledge and investigations around disease mechanisms rather than putting boundaries between studies of affected organs. This legislation would separate pancreatic cancer research at a time when it could benefit from progress in other areas of cancer research. The research agenda of the NCI has been developed within an overall research context based on a broad perspective that will remain essential to the understanding, treatment, and cure of pancreatic cancer. A legislative mandate, such as H.R.733/S.362, that constrains that perspective will not serve patients or their families.

The AAMC stands ready and willing to work with NIH and the Congress to discuss ways we can advance a strategic plan that helps win the fight against this deadly cancer, and preserve the benefits of the current merit review process for all of medical research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darrell G. Kirch". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.
President and CEO