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Matthew Memoli
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Bethesda, MD 20892

Jay Bhattacharya
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Dear Acting Director Memoli and Director Nominee Bhattacharya,

I write with regard to the frustrating lack of answers about the paralytic state of National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding and programs. Given the important role the NIH plays in funding life-saving scientific and medical research across the country, your lack of transparency and action during this de facto funding freeze is unacceptable.

The Trump Administration's disruption of billions of dollars of funding for basic scientific and medical research will have a devastating long-term impact on the nation's technological and scientific breakthroughs that have created miraculous cures for deadly diseases and health problems, and led to trillions of dollars in economic growth. As one analyst noted,

The Trump administration's attacks on science and funding at the National Institutes of Health will set research and training for future scientists back a generation. ...[I]n just two months the administration has cut off opportunities at every phase in a scientist's career. Unless funding and the freedom to pursue science without political bias are restored, biomedical research in the US will become less ambitious, less competitive and result in fewer breakthroughs.... The entire pipeline of biomedical scientists, supported in one way or the other by the funding at NIH, is being culled.¹

Ongoing Failures to Provide Answers for the Collapse of NIH Funding

On February 12, 2025, Senator Markey and I wrote to Acting Director Memoli about the chaos and confusion caused by funding pauses and cuts at the NIH and the impacts of these disruptions at

¹ Bloomberg, "NIH Cuts Create a Lost Generation of Scientists," Lisa Jarvis, March 12, 2025, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2025-03-12/nih-cuts-set-us-scientists-and-research-back-a-generation>.

Massachusetts research institutions.² But he failed to answer our questions about what caused the funding cutoff at the NIH and when operations would resume. Mr. Bhattacharya has been appointed to serve as the next Director of the NIH, and on March 5, 2025, he testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) and also failed to provide basic answers about the current situation.³ When asked directly about grant freezes and pauses, he neither acknowledged the extent of nor took a clear position on the devastating impacts of the disruptions, saying, “it’s hard to know outside. I’ve not interacted with people in the agency.”⁴

When asked whether he would oppose directives from the Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary or the White House regarding how the NIH spends money or funds grants, such as the actions the Trump Administration has already taken at the NIH to date,⁵ he responded that “I don’t believe that either the Secretary or the President would ever ask me to do that.”⁶ This “equivocation about the upheaval suggests [Mr. Bhattacharya is] on board with whatever changes those above him demand next,”⁷ giving me little confidence that he will address this crisis.

New and Emerging Threats Continue to Halt Research Funding and Create Uncertainty

Neither of you appear to have answers about what is going on at this agency, nor a willingness to resolve these problems. But the situation at the NIH remains dire, and it is imperative that you provide clarity immediately. Although the Trump Administration’s initial funding pause was blocked by a federal judge, the Administration failed to fully comply with the order to unfreeze funds.⁸ Days after I sent my February 12 letter, the NIH terminated more than 1,000 workers.⁹ Reporting indicates that the NIH is expecting to cut up to 5,000 workers, which would account for 25% of the current NIH workforce.¹⁰ In the intervening weeks, the NIH abruptly cancelled a decades-long internship

² Letter from Senators Warren and Markey to NIH Acting Director Memoli, February 12, 2025,

https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/warren_markey_letter_to_nih_nsf_on_funding_cuts.pdf.

³ STAT News, “On path to likely confirmation as NIH director, Bhattacharya toes the party line,” Eric Boodman March 5, 2025, <https://www.statnews.com/2025/03/05/jay-bhattacharya-nih-director-confirmation-hearing-analysis/>.

⁴ “Dr. Jayanta Bhattacharya Confirmation Hearing,” <https://www.rev.com/transcripts/dr-jayanta-bhattacharya-confirmation-hearing>.

⁵ The New York Times, “The freeze is rescinded, but a review to eliminate spending on ‘woke’ ideologies will proceed,” Zolan Kanno-Youngs, Maggie Haberman and Annie Karni, January 29, 2025,

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/01/29/us/trump-federal-freeze-funding-news/federal-freeze-grants>.

⁶ “Dr. Jayanta Bhattacharya Confirmation Hearing,” <https://www.rev.com/transcripts/dr-jayanta-bhattacharya-confirmation-hearing>.

⁷ Bloomberg, “NIH Cuts Create a Lost Generation of Scientists,” Lisa Jarvis, March 12, 2025,

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2025-03-12/nih-cuts-set-us-scientists-and-research-back-a-generation>.

⁸ Associated Press, “Federal judge temporarily blocks Trump administration freeze on federal grants and loans,” Chris Megerian and Lindsay Whitehurst, January 29, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-pause-federal-grants-aid-f9948b9996c0ca971f0065fac85737ce>; The Hill, “Judge directs Trump administration to comply with order to unfreeze federal grants,” Ella Lee, February 10, 2025, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5136255-trump-federal-funding-freeze-comply/>.

⁹ Reuters, “Trump administration’s NIH layoffs total 1,165 people, internal email shows,” Ahmed Aboulenein, February 16, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-lays-off-fda-employees-stat-news-reports-2025-02-16/>.

¹⁰ STAT News, “At NIH, ‘everyone is on edge’ as they brace for deep cuts and more centralized control,” Jonathan Wosen, Megan Molteni, Jason Mast, Angus Chen, Lev Facher, and Anil Oza, March 14, 2025, <https://www.statnews.com/2025/03/14/nih-staff-cuts-reorganization-morale/>.

program that was meant to have supported more than 1,000 college students in summer research programs to develop skills for careers in the biomedical sciences.¹¹

Research institutions remain in the dark and are scrambling to react to this confusion. Following the Trump Administration’s proposed cuts in NIH indirect cost rates—funds that support critical research infrastructure like buildings, support staff, and utilities—top Massachusetts research institutions like Harvard and MIT have announced hiring freezes¹² and multiple universities have announced pauses or reductions in graduate student admissions.¹³ The University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences has even had to rescind offers of admission to its doctoral program as a “means of controlling spending during a highly uncertain time.”¹⁴ Although a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction blocking the Administration’s cuts to indirect costs on March 5, 2025, the state of panic at U.S. institutions has hardly abated.¹⁵

Additionally, the Trump Administration appears to have managed to work around the Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) on the Administration’s pause on funding by ceasing to post study section (group of non-federal peer scientists that review and score submitted grant applications) and Advisory Council (panel of scientists representing the funding Institute or Center that reviews submitted and scored grants and makes funding recommendations) meetings to the Federal Register.¹⁶ Without study sections and Advisory Council review sessions, funding decisions are not able to be made, candidates won’t receive a Notice of Award, and funds don’t become available for drawdown.¹⁷ Alarming, although study sections are required to be posted to the Federal Register 15 days before meetings are held, no new study sections were posted to the Federal Register between the day after the inauguration and March 4, 2025, effectively blocking the funding pipeline.¹⁸ Although the NIH indicated that it will “begin sending notices incrementally to the Office of the Federal Register to advertise meetings of scientific review groups/study sections and begin their resumption,” this does nothing to address the meetings that have already been cancelled.¹⁹ Moreover, without

¹¹ STAT News, “Cancellation of NIH summer internships disrupts ‘vital’ training program for U.S. scientists,” Usha Lee McFarling, March 5, 2025, <https://www.statnews.com/2025/03/05/trump-nih-freeze-cancels-summer-internships-vital-pipeline-develops-young-scientists/>.

¹² The Boston Globe, “‘Uncharted Territory.’ Harvard and MIT freeze hiring as Trump widens crackdown on universities,” Mike Damiano, Hilary Burns, Giulia McDonnell Nieto del Rio, March 10, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/03/10/metro/harvard-hiring-freeze-trump-funding-columbia/>.

¹³ The Washington Post, “Hiring freezes, fewer grad students: Funding uncertainty hits colleges,” Susan Svrluga, March 3, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/03/03/universities-budgets-nih-indirect-cost-cuts/>.

¹⁴ WBUR, “UMass medical school rescinds PhD program offers amid uncertainty over federal funds,” Deborah Becker, March 13, 2025, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2025/03/13/umass-biomedical-school-phd-program-federal-funds>.

¹⁵ STAT News, “Judge issues preliminary injunction blocking Trump cuts to NIH research overhead payments,” Jonathan Wosen, March 5, 2025, <https://www.statnews.com/2025/03/05/nih-indirect-costs-lawsuit-federal-judge-extends-order-blocking-trump-cuts/>.

¹⁶ The Boston Globe, “Despite restraining order, pipeline for new research is mysteriously frozen once again,” Kay Lazar and Dana Gerber, February 22, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/02/22/metro/trump-research-nih-grants-funding-science/>;

Nature, “Revealed: NIH research grants still frozen despite lawsuits challenging Trump order,” Max Kozlov, February 20, 2025, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-00540-2>.

¹⁷ National Institutes of Health, “Grants Process,” July 24, 2024, <https://grants.nih.gov/grants-process>.

¹⁸ The Boston Globe, “Despite restraining order, pipeline for new research is mysteriously frozen once again,” Kay Lazar and Dana Gerber, February 22, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/02/22/metro/trump-research-nih-grants-funding-science/>;

Federal Register, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/search?conditions%5B%5D%5B%5D=national-institutes-of-health&order=newest>.

¹⁹ NPR, “NIH partially lifts freeze on funding process for medical research,” Rob Stein, February 26, 2025,

convening the Advisory Council to review study section recommendations, grants will never enter the award phase.

Fundings Cuts Are Already Impacting the 2025-2026 Academic Year – and Beyond

These disruptions continue to hurt research institutions in Massachusetts and beyond. Funding uncertainty has already had a damaging impact on graduate admissions with many Massachusetts institutions requiring departments to limit the number of graduate students they admit during this cycle: “[a]dmissions close July 1st, the academic year starts in September,” one university representative pointed out to my office, “there’s no way to make up for what’s already been lost.” Another university representative said that even though their university hasn’t issued an official campus-wide reduction in admissions, at the level of individual labs and departments “if we can’t predict those grants, we can’t offer positions to students.” The same university representative pointed out how the “arbitrary and capricious”²⁰ slash in indirect rates “isn’t about rightsizing, or what’s best for the field, or where science is going,” adding “if there’s no federal support for science, the model we have just doesn’t work.”

The ongoing chaos at the NIH will have long-lasting impacts, especially on the careers of young and pre-tenure scientists and the pace of innovation. One representative from a Massachusetts research institution shared a story with my office of a talented young MD/PhD who currently has a grant proposal stalled in the pipeline. After a positive study section review, “his proposal wasn’t rejected, but it won’t advance to the next stage for review and funding due to the cancellation of Council meetings.” In this case, this type of grant being pursued is intended as a bridge between postdoctoral work and establishing a lab of one’s own. “By the time this researcher can resubmit, he will have passed out of eligibility”—a devastating scenario for a junior researcher. In another case, an established lab has had their requests for a no-cost extension (a simple and very common extension of the project period for up to 12 months) left unanswered, and they have another well-scored proposal pending at Council since January. The consequences are dire: “This means that they went from running a well-funded center to worrying about dismantling their research team, with disruptions coming as soon as at the end of March.”

Questions about Addressing the NIH Funding Crisis

The many researchers in Massachusetts and beyond who depend on the NIH to keep their critical and lifesaving work moving forward deserve answers about what is going on at the NIH. As the Acting Director and Director Nominee of this agency, it is important that you provide clarity to Congress and the American public during this crisis.

Acting Director Memoli, I request the following information by April 2, 2025:

1. Please describe the process for issuing directives at your agency related to disbursement of funds. Who is involved in these decisions and what considerations are taken into account when processes around disbursement of funds are changed?

<https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/26/g-s1-50920/trump-nih-funding-freeze-medical-research>.

²⁰ Science, “U.S. judge blocks NIH’s plan to slash overhead cost payments,” Jeffrey Mervis, March 5, 2025,

<https://www.science.org/content/article/u-s-judge-blocks-nih-s-plan-slash-overhead-cost-payments>.

2. Please describe the process for issuing directives related to the cancellation of study sections, grant review panels, and other scheduled meetings. Who is involved in these decisions and what considerations are taken into account when cancelling scheduled meetings and panels?
3. Please describe the process for issuing directives related to the setting and re-setting of deadlines on open solicitations. Who is involved in these decisions and what considerations are taken into account when setting and re-setting deadlines on open solicitations?
4. Please describe the process for issuing directives related to the determination of which existing grants and open solicitations are implicated by the Executive Orders (EOs). Who is involved in these decisions and what considerations are taken into account when determining which existing grants and open solicitations are implicated by the EOs?
5. For each of the following EOs, please describe how the order is changing existing processes around choosing which grants to fund:
 - a. *Protecting the American People Against Invasion*
 - b. *Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid*
 - c. *Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements*
 - d. *Unleashing American Energy*
 - e. *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing*
 - f. *Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government*
 - g. *Enforcing the Hyde Amendment*
6. Although some study sections have resumed, there have been no assurances that all activities have resumed and all submitted grants are fairly considered. Please list all study sections and/or Advisory Council meetings that were meant to have occurred between January 21, 2025 and today, and please include the make-up schedule for each of these sessions. For sessions not being rescheduled, please include your expected course of action.
 - a. Please provide a precise timeline indicating when you plan to fully communicate this information to institutions, grant holders, and the general public.
7. Who are you working with and how do you plan to fully resolve the funding freeze at your agency? If you believe there will be barriers to do so, please describe what they are.
8. How did NIH determine that the new 15% cap on indirect rates²¹ was appropriate? Please provide any internal cost estimates or analyses used to determine the appropriate rate, and any analyses of the impact of reducing the rate cap to 15%.
9. Please describe the process for issuing directives related to sending notices to the Office of the Federal Register? Who is involved in these decisions and what considerations are taken into account when sending notices for review groups and study sections?
10. Please describe the precise timeline for resuming each phase of grant application including:
 - a. Peer review by Scientific Review Group or study section
 - b. Advisory Council review and recommendation
 - c. Institute/Center director funding decision
 - d. Issuance of Notice of Award
11. Please describe the process for issuing directives related to the NIH internship programming? Who is involved in these decisions and what considerations are taken into account when cancelling internship programs?


²¹ STAT News, “NIH plans to slash support for indirect research costs, sending shockwaves through science,” Jonathan Wosen, Megan Molteni, Jason Mast, and Usha Lee McFarling, February 7, 2025, <https://www.statnews.com/2025/02/07/nih-slashes-indirect-costs-on-all-grants-to-15-percent-trump/>.

12. Please describe the process for issuing directives related to termination of NIH personnel. Who is involved in these decisions and what considerations are taken into account when termination decisions are made?

Director-nominee Bhattacharya, I ask that you provide the following information by April 2, 2025:

1. If confirmed as Director of the NIH, do you commit to restore NIH funding levels to their previous levels?
2. If confirmed as Director of the NIH, do you commit to resume posting study sections in the Federal Register?
3. If confirmed as Director of the NIH, do you commit to resume Advisory Council meetings?
4. If confirmed as Director of the NIH, would you work to reinstate the decades-long internship program that was meant to have supported more than 1,000 college students in summer research programs to develop skills for careers in the biomedical sciences?
5. If confirmed as Director of the NIH, what steps will you take to reinstate the nearly 1,200 probationary employees terminated by the Trump administration?
6. Although researchers and institutions have received some mild assurances that their awarded and intended funding is available for drawdown, there is panic and concern around how long this will last, and whether grantees can continue to plan their research agenda relying on this funding. For existing grants that are determined to be implicated by the EOs, what course of action do you plan to take?
7. Much of what has occurred since the Trump administration took office is in violation of current U.S. law. For example, the February 7 rate change notice “contravenes Congress’s express directives in the appropriation acts governing the NIH.”²² If the Trump administration asks you to take actions that violate federal law, will you uphold the law?
8. Between 2010 and 2019, the NIH contributed to the development of 354 of 356 drugs (99.4%) approved in the U.S.²³ How do you reconcile the Administration’s de facto funding freeze with your purported support for “gold-standard science and innovation”?

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

²² Complaint, Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. National Institutes of Health, 1:25-cv-10338, (D. Mass. 2025), P. 5, <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mad.280590/gov.uscourts.mad.280590.1.0.pdf>.

²³ Journal of the American Medical Association Health Forum, “Comparison of Research Spending on New Drug Approvals by the National Institutes of Health vs the Pharmaceutical Industry, 2010-2019,” Ekaterina Galkina Cleary, Matthew J. Jackson, Edward W. Zhou, and Fred D. Ledley, April 28, 2023, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10148199/>.