



September 19, 2019

The Honorable James Inhofe  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Inhofe and Smith and Ranking Members Reed and Thornberry:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), associations whose membership includes more than 200 of our nation's top research universities, we thank you for your leadership in passing the fiscal year 2020 (FY20) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) – S. 1790 & H.R. 2500 – through your respective chambers. We write to offer our recommendations on critical provisions aimed at protecting American innovation from threats of foreign interference, cyberattacks, theft, and espionage. We also offer our views on the authorized funding levels in the bill as well as provisions to facilitate technology transfer of important Department of Defense funded research. Please note that as members of the Coalition for National Security Research (CNSR), our organizations share the Defense Science and Technology (S&T) priorities outlined in the Coalition's letter<sup>1</sup>. As negotiations continue towards a final conference agreement, we respectfully submit the recommendations below for your consideration.

### **Securing American Science and Technology**

AAU and APLU members are committed to bolstering the security of university research without sacrificing the open exchange of ideas and the spirit of collaboration that is required for the advancement of science.<sup>2</sup> To do this effectively, improved coordination is needed between the federal intelligence, security and science agencies and the university community. Sec. 1089 of the House-passed version of the NDAA, known as the Securing American Science and Technology Act, or SASTA, would ensure just that. This section 1) directs the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy to establish an interagency working group under the National Science and Technology Council to identify security threats to the U.S. research enterprise and to coordinate federal agency responses to these threats; and 2) creates a new National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine Roundtable to

<sup>1</sup> Coalition for National Security Research FY20 NDAA Conference Priorities Letter: <https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Science-Security/CNSR-AAU-Coalition-Letter-Commends-Congressional-Leaders-NDAA.pdf> (September 2019)

<sup>2</sup> AAU-APLU Joint Op-Ed, "We Must Have Both": <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/08/05/research-universities-must-bolster-both-security-and-openness-opinion> (August 2019)

serve as a means for the federal government to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the academic community and industry partners to address such threats. More than 100 universities, scientific societies, and other organizations have signed a community letter of support endorsing the legislation.<sup>3</sup>

**We urge you to include Sec. 1089 of H.R. 2500 in the final FY20 NDAA conference agreement.**

#### **Robust Federal Investment in Defense Science & Technology Programs**

In addition to properly safeguarding federally-funded research and development from security threats, critical investments are needed to outpace and out-innovate our nation's competitors. The U.S. research enterprise is at a critical inflection point. We must boost investments in Defense S&T. With other nations increasing their investments in research areas important to defense, we risk losing our competitive edge.

AAU and APLU commend the historical support the House and Senate Armed Services Committees have provided to fund research investments in foundational science and technologies. These authorized funds are critical to spurring innovations that safeguard our military men and women, and help the U.S. maintain international military leadership. We note, however, that the overall S&T levels in both S. 1790 and H.R. 2500 fall below FY19 enacted levels as well as what has been recommended by both the House and Senate Appropriations Committee in their FY20 bills. We encourage you to look for opportunities to increase funding to the highest levels possible.

#### **"Phase 0" Proof of Concept Partnership Program for the Department of Defense**

To help improve the return on our federal research investments, more needs to be done to transfer the technologies born from university discovery to the marketplace. The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs are vital to meeting this goal, however, these programs presume that a particular research advancement or technology has enough market value to attract further investment for commercialization. Often times, however, there is insufficient funding available within U.S. universities, or from other sources, to push these technologies across the "valley of death" to the point where they have sufficient commercial value.

AAU and APLU support Sec. 878 (d) of the House-passed NDAA to create a targeted program focused on funding early-stage defense research. This provision would expand the "phase zero" proof-of-concept program at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), known as the "REACH" program, to the STTR program at the Department of Defense and greatly help universities bridge the funding gap that often prevents new discoveries from DoD research projects from moving quickly into the marketplace for applied use.

**We urge you to support the enhancement of technology transfer from universities to small business and industry by including include Sec. 878 (d) of H.R. 2500 in the final FY20 NDAA conference agreement.**

Our associations welcome the opportunity to provide our views to your respective committees on these important matters. Improved federal coordination to mitigate threats to our national security innovation base – coupled with increased federal investment and improved transfer of technology to strengthen that base – are requisite for meeting our national defense strategy and ensuring the United States remains the global innovation leader.

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<sup>3</sup> SASTA Community Letter of Support: <https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Science-Security/SASTA-Letter-of-Support.pdf>  
(May 2019)

Please do not hesitate to contact AAU's Assistant Vice President for Federal Relations, [Hanan Saab](#), or APLU's Assistant Vice President for Research Advocacy & Policy, [Deborah Altenburg](#), if we can be of any assistance as you work to finalize the FY20 National Defense Authorization Act.

Sincerely,



Mary Sue Coleman  
President  
Association of American Universities



Peter McPherson  
President  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

**cc: NDAA Conference Committee Members**