



June 21, 2005

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

VIA FACSIMILE: (202) 228-1229

Dear Senator Specter:

The Alliance for Taxpayer Access urges you to support PubChem, an integral component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) strategic "Roadmap" for spurring development of new medical treatments. PubChem, a freely accessible NIH repository of chemical compounds, gives biomedical researchers a powerful new way to study the functions of genes, cells, and biochemical pathways by linking a range of public data sources.

The American Chemical Society (ACS) has called on Congress to limit PubChem in ways that would make it ineffective, claiming revenue from ACS's Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) will decline if researchers are given access to PubChem. We believe this is untrue. PubChem and the Chemical Abstracts Service databases are complementary, not duplicative in any material way, and they are targeted at different kinds of users and applications.

The taxpayer benefits of PubChem, which leverages our investment in the Human Genome Project, far outweigh any advantage in acceding to the ACS call to be protected. The restrictions on PubChem sought by ACS would stymie scientific progress, place limitations on a key NIH strategy, and limit the effectiveness of NIH's recent award of \$88.9 million in grants to nine institutions to establish the Molecular Libraries Screening Centers Network. Data generated from the high-throughput assays conducted at the screening centers will be made available to researchers in both the public and private sectors through PubChem.

As the lynchpin of the larger NIH "Molecular Libraries and Imaging" initiative, PubChem is expected to speed the development of new drugs by enabling researchers to identify chemicals with potential for therapeutic intervention. Using PubChem, a researcher can link directly from chemical names and structures into a range of relevant NIH-maintained databases -- including genome and DNA sequences, 3D protein structures, results of previously conducted bioassays,

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abstracts of biomedical articles, the full-texts of research articles (when they are available in PubMed Central), and more.

It is implausible that NIH's modestly funded PubChem program would be a substitute for the wide range of resources provided by ACS/CAS, which reportedly has an annual budget of \$260 million and a staff of 1,300. NIH's PubChem has a budget of \$3 million and a staff of 13. This modest outlay greatly enhances the return from NIH's far larger research investments.

Committee language accompanying the House of Representatives 2006 Appropriations bill "urges NIH to work with private sector providers to avoid unnecessary duplication and competition with private sector chemical databases." Since NIH has endeavored all along to do this, and continues to do so, we believe the general sense of this language will not deter NIH from addressing its goals. We encourage the Senate to either accept the House language or strengthen it to ensure NIH's ability to go forward in the most effective manner.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me at 202-296-2296 if you have questions. A member of the Alliance for Taxpayer Access would be happy to meet with you or your staff at any time to provide more information.

Sincerely,



Heather Joseph
Executive Director, SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition)
On behalf of the members of the Alliance for Taxpayer Access:

AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition
American Association of Law Libraries
American Library Association
American Medical Student Association
Arthritis Foundation
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries
Association of College & Research Libraries
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of Research Libraries

Autosomal Recessive Polycystic Kidney Disease and Congenital Hepatic Fibrosis Alliance
(ARPKD/CHF Alliance)
Barth Syndrome Foundation
Boston College Libraries
Boston Library Consortium
Carnegie Mellon University Libraries
Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation
CUNY – City College Libraries
Coalition for Heritable Disorders of Connective Tissue
Colorado State University
Conquer Fragile X Syndrome
Denison University – William H. Doane Library
Down Syndrome Treatment and Research Foundation
Eastern Kentucky University Libraries
Emory University Libraries
Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (FORCE)
Genetic Alliance
Global Neuroscience Initiative Foundation
Greater Western Library Alliance
International Mosaic Down Syndrome Association (IMDSA)
International Journal of Medical Sciences
IsoDicentric 15 Exchange, Advocacy and Support (IDEAS)
Kent State University Libraries
Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering & Technology
Loyola University Chicago Libraries
Medical Education Online
Mycosis Fungoides Foundation
National Alliance for Autism Research
National Coalition for PKU & Allied Disorders
National Fragile X Foundation
National Tay-Sachs & Allied Diseases Association
New England Biolabs
Oberlin College
Ohio Library and Information Network
Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy
Prader-Willi Syndrome Association
Public Knowledge
Public Library of Science
Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum (PXE) International
SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition)
Special Libraries Association

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Spina Bifida Association of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
Tufts University Libraries
University of Colorado at Boulder Libraries
University of Connecticut Libraries
University of Kansas
University of New Hampshire
University of Wisconsin – Madison Libraries
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh – Forrest R. Polk Library
Utah Academic Library Consortium
Wayne State University College of Nursing
Williams College Libraries

Enclosures:

Business Week article
Information World Review article
Chronicle of Higher Education article