

# DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION RESEARCH COALITION

1501 M STREET, N.W. SUITE 700 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005

November 19, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2314 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2413 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
U.S. Senate  
304 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ray Blunt  
U.S. Senate  
260 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1026 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2207 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
U.S. Senate  
437 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
U.S. Senate  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**Re: Fiscal Year 2021 Funding for National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research; Report Language Request on Research Priorities for Federal Research Agencies**

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC), we write to support an increase in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 funding for the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), as proposed in the bipartisan Senate bill released on November 10, 2020. In addition, we are requesting report language in the eventual bicameral compromise bill that emphasizes the importance of disability research across all federal agencies conducting COVID-19 research.

As federal research agencies are continuing to grapple with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DRRC has urged the federal government to prioritize research and data collection on COVID-19 relating to people with disabilities, who are at extremely high risk for COVID infection, serious complications, and death. Increasing NIDILRR funding in FY 2021 will ensure that the agency is able to continue its critical work conducting applied research impacting people

with disabilities, especially regarding crucial research that will help strengthen the federal pandemic response for people with disabilities.

### **FY 2021 Funding at the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research**

NIDILRR's mission is to generate and promote new knowledge that improves the abilities of people with disabilities to perform activities of their choice in the community. Not only are people with disabilities an at-risk minority group facing significant health disparities even before the pandemic, case reports are indicating that the long-term clinical complications of this virus are leading previously nondisabled individuals to develop potentially lifelong disabilities as a result of their infection.

The Senate bill released earlier this month includes a \$2.5 million increase to NIDILRR over FY 2020 funding, for a total level of \$114,470,000 for the agency. Additionally, in early March, the co-chairs of the House Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus, Reps. Jim Langevin (D-RI) and Don Young (R-AK), requested a \$3 million increase to NIDILRR to allow the continuation and expansion of NIDILRR's critical work. NIDILRR's scope includes exploring new and innovative strategies, interventions, and technologies to better achieve the promises of the Americans with Disabilities Act – equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.

With the widespread and outsized impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with disabilities, NIDILRR's work has only become more essential. Adopting the Senate-proposed increase of \$2.5 million in FY 2021 would ensure that the agency is able to continue funding its existing research while also addressing the dire needs stemming from this pandemic. As your offices work to negotiate a compromise for the federal government's appropriations for FY 2021, we urge you to include an increase for NIDILRR's funding to make sure the needs of people with disabilities are met by this important applied research Institute.

### **Report Language on Disability Research Priorities at the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Other Federal Research Agencies**

While additional NIDILRR funding is crucial to developing applied research for long-term outcomes in the disability population, NIDILRR is not the only federal agency conducting critical disability research. Therefore, we are also requesting that the FY 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill (or relevant omnibus spending package, if applicable) include report language emphasizing the importance of disability research across all federal agencies conducting COVID-19 research. Of course, we expect COVID-related research to be a major priority not only for federal funding over the coming years, but in agency's strategic planning efforts to address the pandemic. We respectfully propose the following language:

“The Committee urges the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other federal agencies conducting research on COVID-19 to ensure that their research plans address and prioritize disability, independent living, and

rehabilitation research, especially regarding COVID-19 testing and diagnoses; treatment, including admissions and denials to hospitals and intensive care units, denials of needed accommodations, virus interactions with chronic disease and disability, and recovery patterns; and outcomes, including morbidities, mortalities, rehabilitation, and recovery for individuals with disabilities.”

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. We look forward to continuing to work with you to advance public policy impacting people with disabilities. If you have any questions, please contact the DRRC coordinators listed below.

Sincerely,

Bobby Silverstein, DRRC Coordinator

[Bobby.Silverstein@PowersLaw.com](mailto:Bobby.Silverstein@PowersLaw.com)

Peter Thomas, DRRC Coordinator

[Peter.Thomas@PowersLaw.com](mailto:Peter.Thomas@PowersLaw.com)

Joe Nahra, DRRC Coordinator

[Joseph.Nahra@PowersLaw.com](mailto:Joseph.Nahra@PowersLaw.com)