



July 2, 2009

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman
United States Senate
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0703
Via Fax: (202) 224-9750

Dear Senator Lieberman:

On behalf of these ten national and regional research organizations, we write to thank you for introducing S.1373, “The Federal Research Public Access Act of 2009.” This bill will provide an important mechanism to ensure that manuscripts of peer-reviewed scientific articles resulting from research funded by the U.S. government can be freely accessed and used by American taxpayers – including researchers, teachers, and students.

Timely, barrier-free access to the results of federally funded research is an essential component of our collective investment in science. We fully agree that this information should be shared in cost-effective ways that take advantage of the new technologies available to us and that this increased sharing will help to advance the pace of discovery, as well as to speed the translation of this knowledge into public benefits.

The establishment of interoperable, open digital repositories containing publicly funded research will create an unprecedented, rich new resource for researchers – and all interested members of the public – to tap into. It will also allow this critical layer of information to be linked, for the first time, to the wealth of other publicly accessible databases at federal agencies. Enhanced access to these repositories will further ensure that the maximum use of this research is fully realized – enabling previously unobtainable connections and discoveries to be made.

The proposed bill balances the needs of all stakeholders in the scientific research community. While creating opportunities for unprecedented access and use of research, it provides important safeguards to protect the interests of those who contribute to ensuring the validity and quality of research results. Specifically, the inclusion of an embargo period provides an initial, exclusive distribution option for traditional publishers who may wish to maintain a subscription model for access. Additionally, the requirement for deposit of the author’s final manuscript, rather than the final published article, allows publishers the opportunity to continue to market a product that contains value-added enhancements beyond what is available in the public repositories. The flexibility for each agency to determine its own strategy for establishing a digital repository reflects an understanding that what works for one agency might not be appropriate for another; that one size does not fit all.

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S.1373 reflects the growing worldwide trend of funding agencies and higher education institutions actively working to maximize access to and sharing of research results, recognizing that increasing usage will help deliver an accelerated return on their investment in research. Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston University, Stanford University, and the University of Kansas are but a few of the growing number of campuses that are adopting policies to retain their institutional research outputs through the deposit of research manuscripts in a digital repository.

The bill also advances the progress made by the public access policy of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the first U.S. agency to require public access to taxpayer-funded research. Since its implementation, the NIH policy has resulted in ~4,500 new biomedical manuscripts being made publicly available each month. Demand for this information is extremely high, with more than 450,000 unique users accessing material from this repository each day. Under S.1373, research results related to issues of equally critical importance – from climate change to renewable energy – will be just as readily accessible to the public.

The Federal Research Public Access Act will help broaden access to important research that is now unavailable to academic institutions that can't afford it. Given the tremendous financial pressures on libraries due to the economy, the demand for wider access – especially to federally funded research – is reaching a critical high. And, as libraries, scientists, and publishers, we firmly believe that the potential advancement of scientific research across disciplines that would be made possible by this bill, when enacted, has tremendous positive implications.

Thank you again for your leadership in introducing the Federal Research Public Access Act, and for your long-standing commitment to the success of crucial public access policies.

Sincerely,

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