



# Coalition to Protect Research

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## VOTE "NO" ON NEUGEBAUER

**On Thursday, June 23rd, congressional oversight and the scientific merit review process at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will be undermined if the Neugebauer amendment passes. During the House debate on the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (L-HHS) appropriations bill, an amendment is expected that would stop funding for specific grants involving basic research funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). We wanted to provide some information to you and ask that you continue to support the scientific review process and vote no on any amendment that seeks to rescind funding from peer-reviewed research. Funding for basic research, whether into fundamental brain processes or the impact of successful interpersonal relationships must continue if we are to advance scientific progress.**

### **Possible Neugebauer Amendments**

**Neugebauer:** Prohibits the National Institute of Mental Health at the NIH from further funding a grant studying "perceived regard and relationship resilience." The amendment would not cut any funding to NIMH; it would simply prevent the Institute from funding this grant and free up any funds that would otherwise go to this grant for other mental health grants.

**Neugebauer:** Prohibits the National Institute of Mental Health at the NIH from further funding a grant studying "perceptual bases of visual concepts." The amendment would not cut any funding to NIMH; it would simply prevent the Institute from funding this grant and free up any funds that would otherwise go to this grant for other mental health grants.

### **Is This Research Outside of the NIH or NIMH Mission?**

NIH is the premier biomedical and behavioral research institution in the world. Its mission is to support science to improve the health and well-being of all humanity. At a time when genetic control over diseases is tantalizingly close but not yet possible, knowledge of the behavioral influences on health is a crucial component in the nation's battles against the leading causes of morbidity and mortality. Appropriately, NIH supports a large and robust portfolio of research on all aspects of human development and disease.

Contrary to the assertion that NIMH's mission should focus solely on severe mental illnesses, and away from promoting mental health, the Public Health Service Act (Report 102-546) provides a clear picture of congressional intent regarding NIMH's mission: "The research program established under this subpart shall include support for biomedical and behavioral neuroscience and shall be designed to further the treatment and prevention of mental illness, the promotion of mental health, and the study of psychological, social, and legal factors that influence behavior..."

### **How Does NIH Decide to Fund These Grants?**

The NIH uses a rigorous peer review process to determine which grant applications to fund. NIH's scientific peer review process is the gold standard for determining the quality and relevance of grant proposals. Thousands of scientists each year submit applications to the NIH requesting funding for their scientific proposals. Applications are evaluated initially by the NIH's Center for Scientific Review and peer review groups composed of scientific experts from around the U.S. and the world. These groups (also called "study sections")

assess and rate the scientific and technical merit of the proposed research or training projects. Projects reviewed in a particular session are scored and ranked in relation to each other. The applications are then assigned to one of the 27 institutes and centers at NIH. A second level of peer review is conducted by the NIH National Advisory Councils of the respective funding Institutes or Centers, which are composed of both scientists from the research community and public representatives. These councils ensure that the NIH receives advice from a cross-section of the U.S. population in its deliberation and decision-making.

This system ensures that research conducted and supported with taxpayer dollars is scientifically meritorious and serves to improve the lives of all people equally. Approximately 70 percent of meritorious, scientifically valid proposals do not receive funding through this process. The grants that receive funding, however, are the best in their fields.

## NIMH Grants Under Scrutiny

**Grant Title:** Perceptual Bases of Visual Concepts  
**Grant Number:** 5R01MH047313-14  
**Researcher:** E.A. Wasserman, Ph.D.  
**University:** University of Iowa

### Research Relevance:

- This research focuses on increasing understanding of vision and perception using pigeons as models. The research compares the basic processes of perception, learning, memory and cognition across a variety of species. This cross-species comparison helps illuminate how various mental and behavioral abilities are related and how the human brain is organized. Research carried out with animals can lead to new techniques for enhancing perception, cognition, and behavior across the lifespan in both normal and disordered human populations. The research has particular relevance for the development of cognitive/behavioral therapies for people with mental and developmental disorders and for the eventual development of prostheses and assistive devices for people with visual impairments.
- The targeted project investigates the abilities of pigeons to visually perceive complex objects, remember them, and categorize them into abstract categories. By demonstrating the ways in which these abilities in pigeons are similar to or different from those of humans, the research will inform us about the brain mechanisms that underlie human perception and cognition. Pigeons have much smaller brains than humans and more invasive research can be performed with them. Thus they serve as a useful model for studies of mechanisms that are common to both birds and humans.
- Some earlier researchers suggested that advanced language or symbolic capacities are required for memory and abstract categorization. But if pigeons are shown to perform in ways that parallel humans, then it is clear that such capacities are not in fact required. Indeed, the results now emerging from this project indicate that pigeons are quite similar to humans and that the brain mechanisms for perception, memory, and categorization do not depend on sophisticated symbolic capacities. The results further indicate that the ways in which pigeon brains divide up and code visual stimuli are similar to the ways in which human brains operate.

**Grant Title:** Perceived Regard and Relationship Resilience  
**Grant Number:** 5R01MH060105-05  
**Researcher:** Sandra Murray, Ph.D.  
**University:** State University of New York at Buffalo

**Research Relevance:**

- This study is investigating factors that contribute to successful marriages and how personal feelings of self-esteem influence the capacity to sustain satisfying close relationships. Successful relationships contribute to better health outcomes for both children and adults. In particular, for those suffering from depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia, poor relationship quality may exacerbate their mental disorders and impact the success of their treatment. Better understanding the factors that lead to successful marriages could therefore have important public health benefits. This study also seeks to develop a better understanding of such mental illnesses as depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, and borderline personality.
- This research might also facilitate the development of clinical interventions, such as fostering insight into a partner's positive regard and unconditional acceptance that might circumvent harmful interaction patterns that could lead to divorce or increase the risk for domestic violence.
- Such research will help mental health professionals and others whose work it is to help couples strengthen this essential building block of society, and it will also aid in the study of mental illnesses for which the inability to form relationships is an important symptom, e.g. depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, and borderline personality disorders.
- The American Psychological Association (APA) honored Sandra L. Murray, Associate Professor of Psychology, with the 2003 Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contribution to Psychology in the area of social psychology and is also President-Elect of the Society of Experimental Social Psychology, the most honored society in her discipline.

**If you have any questions, please contact CPR's Co-Chairs, Angela Sharpe of the Consortium of Social Science Associations at [alsharpe@coffa.org](mailto:alsharpe@coffa.org) or (202) 842-3525, or Karen Studwell of the American Psychological Association at [kstudwell@apa.org](mailto:kstudwell@apa.org) or (202) 336-5585.**