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March 20, 2008

Elias Zerhouni, M.D.
Director, National Institutes of Health
Building 1, Room 126
1 Center Drive, MSC 0148
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

The National Postdoctoral Association has always taken a collaborative and positive approach in its efforts to improve postdoctoral training, and we have been extremely encouraged by your leadership and obvious commitment to the next generation of scientists. The NPA believes strongly that recent changes in NIH policies and programs regarding mentoring, increased access to funding for new investigators, and improvements in grant reviewing are all essential steps towards a more sustainable and equitable environment that will encourage the best and brightest young minds to pursue careers in biomedical research.

Despite these many accomplishments, we are concerned and disappointed at the recent announcement that stipends for National Research Service Award recipients have been frozen for the second consecutive year. The National Postdoctoral Association recognizes that budgetary constraints are forcing difficult decisions to be made, but maintaining 2008 stipends at 2006 levels results in a five percent decrease in actual value of these prestigious awards. As you know, this policy has repercussions well beyond those directly funded by an NRSA, since this stipend scale has become the de facto standard for most institutions employing postdoctoral scholars in the United States. Perhaps more troubling is the fact that in 2001, the NIH released a statement in response to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report *Addressing the Nation's Changing Needs for Biomedical and Behavioral Scientists*, agreeing with the finding that postdoctoral stipends were unduly low and setting a target of \$45,000 for year 0 postdoctoral fellows, consistent with NSF postdoctoral stipends. The NIH statement indicated plans for annual 10-12 percent increases until this target was met, and further pledged annual cost of living adjustments to ensure that stipends were maintained at constant real value levels. In contrast to this pledge, only a single ten percent increase occurred in 2003, with no increases in 2005, 2007, and now 2008. Meanwhile, the NSF has continued to make cost of living adjustments to its stipends for postdoctoral fellows, and they are now closer to \$50,000.

The NPA understands that the NIH has itself faced a flat budget in recent years, but feels that it would be preferable to reduce the number of awards made rather than fall further behind in bringing stipends up to a level commensurate with the training and expertise of the best postdoctoral scholars in the US. The NRSA program is at its core a mechanism to identify and reward the most capable and promising young

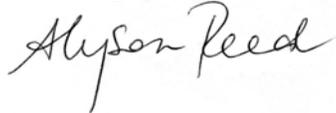
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American scientists, and this goal will be difficult to achieve if the recipients are facing stipends that are in fact reduced from levels that were deemed insufficient seven years ago.

The NIH can demonstrate that it believes the current generation of postdoctoral scholars will drive the scientific and medical discoveries of the next thirty years by fulfilling its commitment to improving the stipends paid to its NRSA recipients. The NPA believes that this investment would be an important symbolic stand illustrating that institutions training these scholars should treat them as the essential components of the research enterprise they are.

We would be pleased to meet with you or your designee to discuss the best strategies for ensuring that the NRSA program continues to support postdoctoral scholars at a level that will sustain their basic economic survival while also conferring a level of status and prestige consistent with the award. Thank you again for your leadership on these issues and your willingness to partner with the NPA in addressing them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alyson Reed". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Alyson Reed
Executive Director