March 11, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Committee on Appropriations  
2413 Rayburn  
Washington, DC  20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Committee on Appropriations  
2207 Rayburn  
Washington, DC  20515

Dear Representatives DeLauro and Cole,

As organizations committed to bone health and musculoskeletal well-being, we would like to express support for the addition of report language to the 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill which would encourage further research into musculoskeletal diversity. Specifically, we would like to reemphasize the value of researching prevention and treatment of musculoskeletal diseases in intersectional populations.

More than 1 in 4 Americans suffer from bone or joint health problems, making it the leading cause of physical disability in the US. In 2014, this resulted in 440 million missed work-days and 25 percent of all new disability claims. The cost is estimated to be $980 billion annually for treatment and lost wages.¹ Making sure that all patients have access to high quality musculoskeletal care means better outcomes and increased benefits, not only for patients, but our economy as well.

Genetic and epigenetic factors underlie cultural, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, geographic and sex differences in bone mass, fracture risk and fracture repair, as well as functional status and differences in levels of disease activity affecting joints and other connective structures. It is important that these factors be researched. Additionally, research into sex differences in ultra-high-performance sports and recreational activities would be beneficial. Such differences are documented in the military population and affect combat readiness as well as training completion rates. Finally, we believe more research is needed into rural inequities in musculoskeletal care relating to occupational injury types and resulting complications due to limited access to specialty care.

While the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has made great strides in increasing diversity in research, there is more to be done. We recommend the following report language to the 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

The NIH has made significant progress in terms of diversity in musculoskeletal research and has included it as a priority in its 2020-2024 strategic plan, we encourage additional focused research into sexual dimorphism, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status and how these factors relate to injury prevention, levels of disease activity and functional status, access, and quality of care across the lifespan. Specifically, we recommend that the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) have Request for Applications (RFA) or Participatory Action Research (PAR) grant programs on disparities similar to those of the National Institutes of Minority Health and Health Disparities or the National Cancer Institute. Additionally, further research is needed into rural inequities in musculoskeletal care in terms of addressing occupational injury types and resulting complications due to limited specialty care access.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Association of Latino Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Rheumatology
American Geriatrics Society
American Society for Bone and Mineral Research
Association of Women in Rheumatology
Bone and Joint Initiative
International Geriatric Fracture Society
International Society for Clinical Densitometry
J.R. Gladden Orthopaedic Society
National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses
National Association of Spine Specialists
Orthopaedic Trauma Association
Ruth Jackson Orthopaedic Society