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SPARC

February 14, 2012

The Honorable Representative Michael F. Doyle
United States House of Representatives
401 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3814

Via Fax: 202-225-3084

To the Honorable Representative Doyle:

On behalf of these ten national and regional library, publishing, research and advocacy organizations, we write to thank you for introducing H.R. 4004, “The Federal Research Public Access Act.” This bill will provide an important mechanism to ensure that manuscripts of peer-reviewed scientific articles reporting on research funded by the U.S. Government can be freely accessed and used by all American taxpayers – including researchers, teachers, students and businesses.

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 newly available technologies. This increased sharing will help to advance the pace of discovery, as well as to speed the translation of this knowledge into innovative new services and products – fueling economic growth, and helping to create jobs.

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 allow this critical layer of information to be linked, for the first time, to the wealth of other publicly accessible databases at federal agencies. For the first time, maximum use of this research will be fully realized – opening the door for previously unobtainable connections and discoveries to be made.

The proposed bill recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach to public access policy is impractical, and 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 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.

The requirement for deposit of the author’s final manuscript, rather than the final published

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article, allows publishers the opportunity to continue to market a product that contains value-added enhancements beyond what is available in the public repositories. And finally, the flexibility for each agency to determine its own strategy for establishing a digital repository reflects an understanding that a location that works for one agency might not be appropriate for another

H.R. 4004 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, Stanford University, Oberlin College, 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 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 an average of 90,000 new biomedical manuscripts being made publicly available each year. Demand for this information is extremely high, with more than 500,000 unique users accessing material from this repository each day. Under H.R. 4004, research results related to issues of equally critical importance – from climate change to renewable energy – will be just as readily accessible to the public.

Finally, the proposed bill is also consistent with the demonstrated interests of the Administration. As part of the Open Government Directive, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) recently issued a call for public comment on the potential implementation of public access policies (like the one proposed in H.R. 4004) across all U.S. science agencies. This reflects the growing commitment to ensure that the public's investment in scientific research is transparent to all citizens, and that the return on this public investment is maximized.

The Federal Research Public Access Act will help broaden access to important research that is now unavailable to too many members of the public at a time when the demand for wider access – especially to federally funded research – is reaching a critical high. As libraries, scientists, researchers and publishers, we firmly believe that this legislation will result in the acceleration of scientific progress, and lead to important benefits to the U.S. economy – including the creation of new jobs in a broad range of sectors who depend on access to scientific research to innovate.

We 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, and look forward to working with you to see that this important legislation is passed into law.

Sincerely,

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