April 13, 2018

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Senate Appropriations Committee
136 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee of Labor-HHS-Education
Senate Appropriations Committee
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray,

We are writing to respectfully request that your subcommittee include robust funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative.

Brain disorders such as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, autism, epilepsy, schizophrenia, depression, addiction, and traumatic brain injury, are projected to be some of the most disabling and costly chronic diseases in the 21st century. One in three Americans will have a brain or nervous system disorder sometime in their life and the cost of treating neurologic disorders is more than $500 billion each year. These statistics are grave, but they pale in comparison to the real-life impact that these diseases have on millions of Americans and their loved ones each day. Regrettably, we do not currently know enough about the brain to begin to meet this dire health and economic challenge. Fortunately, the BRAIN Initiative seeks to change that.

The complexity of the brain’s 100 billion cells and 100 trillion connections were once thought to be beyond the realm of human understanding. However, the BRAIN Initiative – a carefully designed project led by an inter-disciplinary team of some of the nation’s greatest scientists – has demonstrated how to achieve this unimaginable goal. For instance, the BRAIN Initiative has already discovered a new method for quickly identifying brain cell types, allowing scientists to accomplish in weeks what previously took years. This finding has already contributed to our understanding of the Zika virus, Down syndrome, and schizophrenia.

It is hoped that, going forward, the technologies developed though the BRAIN Initiative will reveal the underlying pathology of brain disorders – both neurologic and psychiatric – and lead to a new era of discoveries of treatments, cures, and modes of prevention of these disorders that afflict up to 50 million of our fellow Americans.

Robust funding of the NIH, and subsequently the BRAIN Initiative, will enable the United States to remain a leader of biomedical research and to address the devastation wrought by neurologic disorders. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to the subcommittee’s effort to successfully fund this critical initiative.
Sincerely,

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate

M. MICHAEL ROUNDS  
United States Senate

EDWARD J. MARKEY  
United States Senate

SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senate

CORY A. BOOKER  
United States Senate

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN  
United States Senate

AMY KLOBUCHAR  
United States Senate

KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND  
United States Senate

SUSAN COLLINS  
United States Senate

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE  
United States Senate