March 17, 2016

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

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Senate Appropriations Committee
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray,

As you and your colleagues begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies appropriations bill, we ask for your strong support for increases in funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) of at least $825 million, as requested by the President’s FY2017 budget, and that $45 million of this increase goes to support the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative.

As you know, brain disorders will 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 neurological disorders is more than $500 billion every year. The statistics are sobering, but we do not currently know enough about the brain to begin to meet this human and economic challenge—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, this carefully designed project by an inter-disciplinary team of some of the nation’s greatest scientists has demonstrated what has to be done to make this formerly unimaginable goal achievable. With a plan that includes specific goals, milestones and deliverables, this important Initiative can be realized and, with it, the incredible health and economic benefits it promises will follow.

It is hoped that the technologies developed through the BRAIN Initiative will reveal the underlying pathology of brain disorders – both neurological 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 BRAIN Initiative will enable the United States to remain a leader of biomedical research and to address the devastation wrought by neurological disorders. We look forward to the subcommittee’s effort to successfully fund this critical initiative. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator

EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senator