

Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern (MA-02)
Testimony before the LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
April 30, 2024

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Committee –

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on some of my priorities for the FY2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

We hold, in our power, the ability to lower diet-related disease, improve health outcomes, and lower health care spending. Food **is** medicine, and we can do all of these things by better incorporating nutrition in our health care.

A bipartisan group of Members, including my dear friend Barbara Lee, who serves on this subcommittee, have authored a request for funding and report language directing the Department of Health and Human Services to advance this work, as outlined in the 2022 National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.¹ The letter calls upon this subcommittee to increase funding for the Office of Nutrition Research at NIH, including support for the Food is Medicine Centers of Excellence. We are also asking for \$5 million to continue the incredible work at HHS to implement the National Strategy and to establish a knowledge hub that will collaborate with other federal departments to craft best practices, tools, and guidance to advance food is medicine initiatives nationwide.

Additionally, we are requesting report language to improve medical nutrition education for doctors, better incorporate Medically Tailored Meals (MTMs) and Produce Prescriptions into our current health care programs, and provide technical assistance to states seeking to expand their food is medicine work under the Medicaid 1115 waiver.

Taken together, these advancements would dramatically scale up food is medicine work happening within the U.S. Government and across the country, helping to save lives, improve nutrition, and lower health care costs.

I want to thank you for the Committee’s longstanding support for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program, which is authorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act and administered by the Department of Education. The Innovative Approaches to Literacy grant program has awarded over 200 grants to non-profits and school districts around the country since its creation in FY2012. IAL grants provide access to literacy community-based literacy programs for students in low-income and underserved communities. Given the emerging evidence of pandemic-related learning loss, bolstering programs that support children’s literacy is more important now than ever. I ask that the Committee maintain its historic commitment to this program and prioritize funding for the IAL grant program.

In addition to my general support for IAL grants, I want to express my specific support for those grants that go to programs that support pediatric literacy programs that are provided during well-

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/White-House-National-Strategy-on-Hunger-Nutrition-and-Health-FINAL.pdf>

child visits by medical providers trained in research-based methods of early language and literacy. Reach Out and Read, the only national pediatric literacy model endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, reaches 4.4 million children across every state and in Massachusetts 2nd Congressional District, Reach Out and Read has 42 sites and 361 participating providers. I ask that the Committee consider supporting language that encourages the Department of Education to use a portion of the funds appropriated for IAL grants to support pediatric literacy programs.

I would also like to highlight the importance of supporting additional health-related requests.

Mitochondria play a central role in the host's response to viral infection and immunity by acting as a platform for immune signaling. Medical research continues to identify new mitochondrial disorders and confirms the central role that mitochondrial dysfunction plays in a number of major diseases. Given the advancements in biomedical knowledge, clinical research, and care interventions, the NIH should now fund one or more mitochondrial disease centers of excellence through competitive award vehicles. Additionally, an increasing body of evidence has developed that connects impaired mitochondrial function to the post-Covid conditions commonly known as "long Covid." I ask that the Committee support language that increases funding for mitochondrial disease research and prioritizes the development of lifesaving therapeutics.

Childhood Post-Infectious Neuroimmune Disorders (CPINDSs), such as Pediatric Acute-Onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS) and Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcus (PANDAS), are poorly understood conditions that are believed to be the result of a misguided immune response that attacks the brain following an infection. This inflammatory process leads to debilitating neurological and behavioral changes in children. I ask that you consider supporting language directing the NIH to allocate funding for research and awareness grants relating to PANS/PANDAS.

The Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) launched its nationwide health innovation network in September 2023, including the Investor Catalyst Hub which is based in Massachusetts. The Hub purpose is to accelerate commercialization of the medical breakthroughs funded by ARPHA-H and carried out by performers across the nation. The Hub aims to engage "spokes" in all fifty states to ensure that resources and expertise can be quickly deployed where they are most needed. I ask that you consider supporting language that encourages ARPA-H to provide continued funding for the Investor Catalyst Hub and Spoke network.

The Rapid Acceleration Diagnostics (RADx) Initiative was officially launched in April 2020 with a \$500 million investment through emergency appropriations from Congress to speed innovation in the development, commercialization, and implementation of technologies for COVID-19 testing. RADx applies a unique evaluation to proposed testing technologies and brings technical, regulatory, and business experts together to ensure that the most promising technologies are brought to market. Thanks to RADx, 55 distinct COVID-19 testing technologies (including at-home tests) have been authorized by the FDA for emergency use and over 7 billion tests have been produced to date. I ask that the Committee encourage the National Institute of

Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB) to continue to expand the innovation funnel model beyond COVID-19 testing to address other critical unmet needs in diagnostic testing.

Lastly, I am grateful for the Committee's previous support of neurofibromatosis (NF) research. As you craft the FY2025 appropriations bill, I ask that the Committee continue to consider the Americans suffering from this disease and include report language in the Office of the Director account encouraging various institutes at the NIH to continue to expand their NF research portfolios.