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Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research and Technology
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Academic Research Regulatory Relief: A Review of New Recommendations”

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Thank you Chairwoman Comstock for holding this hearing, and thank you to all of the witnesses for being here this morning.

Efforts to streamline and reduce the burden of administrative requirements placed on academic researchers – while maintaining a strong system of accountability and scientific integrity – are not new. The Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP) began 30 years ago, and the Council on Governmental Relations, which represents and supports universities in complying with federal regulations, dates back to the post-WWII era.

However, as research budgets have flattened or declined and our best and brightest young researchers increasingly look elsewhere, the topic of reducing the administrative burden on federal research has taken on new urgency. The FDP reported that academic researchers spend 42 percent of their time on activities other than academic research, including administrative burden. That number has since been challenged, but I think we all agree with the basic premise of this hearing and all of the related reports – too much valuable time of our researchers is wasted on excessive compliance with excessive regulations. Issues like subrecipient monitoring, micropurchase threshold, biosketches, open access policies, and time and effort reporting add up to a lot of time for researchers. I understand this from my own experiences as a college professor, through discussions with former colleagues, and from talking to researchers and research university administrators as I have served as chair and then the ranking member of this subcommittee for the past 8 years.

The Uniform Guidance issued by the Office of Management and Budget in December 2013 made several steps in the right direction. For example, it provided flexibility for universities to examine alternatives to traditional time and effort reporting on grants including using payroll systems to verify work performed. Inspectors general, who opposed this change, still have full authority to conduct audits of those systems to ensure accountability for federal funds. Unfortunately, the Uniform Guidance also included changes that increased administrative burden without obviously increasing accountability, such as the reduction of the micro-purchase threshold for competitive bids.

Two years ago we held a hearing to review the findings and recommendations from the National Science Board about reducing the administrative burden on academic research. Today we are reviewing two more recent reports, one from the National Academies and the other from the GAO. In response to these reports, and working closely with the stakeholder community, I developed bipartisan legislation, H.R. 5583, to implement some of the key recommendations to Congress.

H.R. 5583, the University Regulation Streamlining and Harmonization Act, would address issues around researcher biosketches, the micro-purchase threshold, and other regulations on academic research. However, the most important part of the legislation is the creation of a research policy board at OMB. The board would allow members of the research community to meet with agency and OMB officials to suggest ways to streamline rules across agencies. This board would not be able to overrule or delay any

actions taken by OMB, but rather would serve to give the research community a seat at the table to help advise against overly onerous research regulations both now and in the future.

This bill has received strong support from the research community, including endorsements from the Association of American Universities and the Council on Governmental Relations among others. While the clock is ticking on this Congress, I hope we will be able to implement at least some of these proposals – if not this entire bill – before the end of the year. Either way, I hope that OMB, OSTP, and federal research agencies will continue to work on the issues identified in these reports and in my legislation.

These hearings on administrative burden, along with the legislative efforts offered by myself and Chairwoman Comstock, should demonstrate clearly to the research community and agency officials alike that this committee is engaged on this issue and will continue to provide oversight and fix problems as they are identified.

With that, I want to thank today's witnesses for your contributions to these efforts and for your testimony. I look forward to a fruitful discussion, and I yield back.