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Andrew G. Shuman, MD, HEC-C

August 12, 2025

The Honorable Tom Cole
U.S. House of Representatives
2207 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
U.S. House of Representatives
2161 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chairman Guthrie, and Ranking Member Pallone:

On behalf of the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), the nation’s largest medical organization representing approximately 13,000 physician specialists dedicated to the care of patients with disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the proposed merger of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) into a new National Institute for Child and Women’s Health, Sensory Disorders, and Communication (NICWHSDC).

Since Congress statutorily established the NIDCD in 1988, the Institute has led methodological, evidence-based research that has significantly advanced hearing and communication sciences. This work has produced real breakthroughs. Multichannel cochlear implants developed through NIDCD funding have restored hearing to more than one million people. Universal newborn hearing screening programs, also based on NIDCD research, now test nearly every American baby at birth and connect those with hearing loss to early intervention.

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House of Representatives
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
U.S. House of Representatives
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Most recently, it was NIDCD research that validated the safety and benefit of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids, opening a competitive marketplace that promises affordable solutions for millions of adults with mild-to-moderate hearing loss. Coupled with cutting-edge work in hair-cell regeneration, tinnitus, and speech-language biology, these achievements illustrate how a mission-dedicated research institute can deliver high-impact, quality public health advances.

Given this record of achievement, we are concerned by the fiscal year 2026 proposal to eliminate the NIDCD as an independent entity and absorb its mission into a broader institute, especially when coupled with the proposal to simultaneously reduce its Research Project Grant (RPG) budget by \$682 million. This would be a nearly 50% decrease in funding that would almost certainly eliminate hundreds of competitively awarded research grants and dramatically slow the pipeline of innovations that our nation's patients desperately need. According to the budget justification for the proposed NICWHSDC, RPG support would drop from \$1.43 billion to \$746.9 million in a single fiscal year. While we recognize the goal of eliminating waste and redundancy, a budget cut and structural reorganization of this magnitude would jeopardize ongoing clinical trials, discourage emerging investigators, and cede U.S. leadership in hearing and communication-science research.

AAO-HNS respectfully urges your committees to preserve the independence of NIDCD and maintain, at a minimum, current-year funding levels for both its intramural and extramural programs. Doing so would protect a proven engine of scientific discovery, foster innovation in hearing technologies, and uphold the bipartisan goals embodied in the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act and the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program, both of which trace their roots to NIDCD-supported science.

We are here to support your efforts to ensure federal investments continue to produce life-changing outcomes for the nearly one in six Americans affected by hearing, balance, voice, speech, or language disorders. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your commitment to advancing the science that helps all Americans communicate and connect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Shah', written in a cursive style.

Rahul K. Shah, MD, MBA
Executive Vice President/CEO
American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery