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**House Report 110-231 - DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2008**

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NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE

Mission- NEI conducts and supports basic and clinical research, research training, and other programs with respect to blinding eye diseases, visual disorders, mechanisms of visual function, preservation of sight, and the special health problems and needs of individuals who are visually-impaired or blind. In addition, NEI is responsible for the dissemination of information, specifically public and professional education programs aimed at the prevention of blindness.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD). --The Committee commends NEI for its trans-Institute research into the cause, prevention, and treatment of AMD, the nation's leading cause of blindness, including identification of gene variants associated with an increased risk for AMD, which presents an opportunity to predict and preempt the disease. The Committee encourages further research into diagnostics for early detection and appropriate therapies. The Committee also applauds NEI for initiating the second phase of its age-related eye disease study, in which additional dietary supplements are being studied to determine if they can demonstrate or enhance their protective effects against progression to the advanced form of AMD, as shown with dietary zinc and antioxidant vitamins in the study's first phase. This research is a potentially cost-effective means by which to decrease the progression of this disease.

Diabetic eye disease. --The Committee applauds NEI for the collaborative efforts of the diabetic retinopathy clinical research network to test innovative treatments for diabetic eye disease. The Institute is encouraged to consider expanding and extending the network by increasing the number of clinical trials with new drugs and therapeutics that can treat and prevent diabetic retinopathy.

National ophthalmic disease genotyping network- The Committee congratulates NEI on its progress in identifying many of the genes involved in some of the most devastating eye diseases, including age-related macular degeneration (AMD), retinitis pigmentosa (RP), and glaucoma, and the progress that has been made in understanding the underlying disease mechanisms and in developing appropriate treatments. NEI's new national ophthalmic disease genotyping network (eyeGENE) will help accelerate application of these new approaches to medicine. By encouraging the participation of patients and their families who need highly-specialized genetic testing services and coordinating the efforts of many vision research laboratories, vital information is being collected confidentially and maintained securely. This

information will help preempt eye disease by enabling qualified investigators to develop targeted treatments and to identify those individuals who are appropriate candidates for these treatments.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SCIENCES

Mission- The mission of NIEHS is to prevent disease and improve human health by using environmental sciences to understand human biology and disease. This mission is achieved through conducting and supporting disease-oriented biomedical research (basic, integrative, clinical, and epidemiologic), enhancing research capacity in environmental health sciences, prevention and intervention strategies, and communication with researchers, public health and health care providers, and the public.

Validation of alternative methods- The Committee commends the interagency coordinating committee on the validation of alternative methods (ICCVAM) for beginning to develop a five-year plan to research, develop, translate and validate new and revised non-animal and other alternative assays for integration of reliable methods into Federal agency testing programs. The plan will prioritize areas which have the potential to most significantly and rapidly reduce, refine or replace laboratory animal methods. The Committee requests that the plan be submitted to the Committee by January 1, 2008.

Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency (Alpha 1)- The Committee is aware that Alpha-1 is the major genetic risk factor for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S. and the only leading cause of death with a rising mortality. As many as three percent of individuals with COPD have undetected Alpha-1. Given the link between environmental factors and the onset of Alpha-1-related COPD, the Committee encourages NIEHS to develop research initiatives to explore gene-environment interaction research and to support public-private partnerships.

Bone marrow failure diseases- Aplastic anemia, myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS) and paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria (PNH) are life threatening, non-contagious diseases. While there are no known causes of bone marrow failure diseases, they have been linked to environmental factors. The Committee encourages NIEHS to work with NHLBI and NCI to fund research that explores these links to determine what, if any, environmental factors may cause bone marrow failure diseases.

Mercury- In order to properly research gaps in the area of mercury exposure and brain chemistry, the Committee encourages NIEHS encouraged to pursue studies of how inorganic mercury and organic mercury compounds (including ethyl, methyl, and other forms of mercury from all sources) are processed in the bodies of children and adults. NIEHS is also encouraged to support studies of the toxic effects of inorganic mercury and organic mercury compounds on the nervous systems of young children, adults, and the elderly and methods of properly removing mercury and mercury-containing compounds from the brains of affected humans. The Committee requests NIEHS to evaluate the feasibility of conducting several studies outlined in the 2006 NIEHS report to the Committee entitled: 'Thimerosal Exposure and Childhood Vaccines' and report back to the Committee on its plan by the end of February 2008.

NIH is encouraged to continue its work on the long-term effects of the exposure of pregnant women to methyl mercury, including higher than average levels of exposure, and to report to the Committee by April 1, 2008 the results of these studies.

Toxic exposure and brain development- Notwithstanding the Institute of Medicine May 2004 report on autism, the Committee believes it is important to develop a more complete understanding of the impact that toxic exposures may have on brain development. There is a convergence of findings from tissue culture studies, animal models, and clinical studies of immune dysfunction in children with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders that

suggests a biological link between genetic sensitivity and damage to developing brains from certain toxins. It is important that NIH continue this research to better understand the impact that exposures to mercury (including thimerosal) and other toxins may have on brain development. A more complete understanding of the impact of these exposures through research, including animal models, will help to develop more effective interventions.

Parkinson's disease- The Committee commends NIEHS for funding the collaborative centers for neurodegenerative disease environmental research (CCNDER) to foster multidisciplinary research approaches to elucidate gene-environment interactions in neurodegenerative diseases. The Committee encourages NIEHS to ensure that the CCNDER program continues to pursue promising Parkinson's research resulting from the work of the collaborative centers for Parkinson's disease environmental research (CCPDER) program. The Committee requests NIEHS to report to Congress on the outcomes and results of Parkinson's disease research conducted under CCPDER and plans for ensuring that promising Parkinson's research continues under the new CCNDER program.

Food allergies. --The Committee recognizes the potential relationship between environmental conditions and food allergies, and encourages NIEHS to fund research in cooperation with NIAID to understand the causes and potential therapies for the growing danger of anaphylaxis resulting from food allergies.

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