



AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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**Statement by Sally T. Hillsman
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On NIH-funded Research and the Peer-review Process

The American Sociological Association (ASA) together with social and health scientists across the nation defend the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) decision to fund important health research relating to human sexual behavior and drug abuse. This research directly confronts social and behavioral as well as biomedical factors that significantly affect the health of Americans and their communities. Such research—the topic of congressional inquiries during an October 2, 2003, hearing by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce—may deal with subject matter about which many feel uncomfortable and that some feel is offensive, but these areas of research are nonetheless necessary areas of scientific study to ensure research results yield significant benefits for our communities' and citizens' health and well-being.

A hallmark of an advanced free society is ethical but politically unfettered empirical investigation that (1) yields trustworthy, valid, important, and responsible scientific results; (2) does not recoil from what might be considered politically sensitive or distasteful topics by some; and (3) courageously allows intellectual independence and objectivity on scientifically legitimate topics that a minority may find “objectionable.” America's respect for rational science is based on the common understanding that serious health, economic, and social consequences are at stake. While congressional oversight of NIH is essential to ensure accountability to taxpayers, Congress cannot allow NIH science to be undermined by parochial or ideological constraints that weaken our public health enterprise. Americans demand intellectual honesty in health research and need it to protect themselves, their families, and their communities.

The American Sociological Association strongly opposes any action by Congress that would restrict the ability of the NIH to fund high-quality, peer-reviewed research, and ASA affirms its support for the ability of NIH to support high-quality, public health-related research on sexual function and sexual behavior. The ASA considers any congressional actions to constrain NIH in terms of proscriptions on what should be considered “politically appropriate” health-related topics to be a serious threat to the integrity of the peer review process and the independence of scientific thought. Such restrictions would represent political intrusion into scientific research. Such intrusion is destructive to quality health science and not in the best interests of the American public, which depends upon the highest quality research in the development of scientific knowledge.

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The American Sociological Association, founded in 1905, is a non-profit membership association dedicated to serving sociologists in their work, advancing sociology as a science and profession, and promoting the contributions and use of sociology to society.