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March 22, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 2051

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Labor, Health and Human Services  
Education and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Labor, Health and Human Services  
Education and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairs Cochran and Blunt and Ranking Members Leahy and Murray:

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) firmly opposes the Administration's proposed budget which reduces the funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by \$5.8 billion. These cuts risk derailing decades of advancement in the diagnosis, understanding and treatment of deadly blood cancers. We ask that you reject these proposed cuts and increase funding for the NIH in future appropriations bills.

LLS's goal is a world without blood cancers. We have made significant progress but there are still 1.2 million people in the US living with or in remission from a blood cancer and more than a third of blood cancer patients still do not survive five years after their diagnosis.

We are closer than ever to truly understanding the biology of cancer, and once unimaginable, new breakthrough treatments and more precisely targeted therapies are being developed and approved. NIH is a world renowned leader in scientific discovery. While the Budget Blueprint is not clear on how cuts will be applied, if they are allocated proportionally across NIH, they represent a nearly \$1 billion cut to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), which will devastate the landscape of cancer research. These proposed cuts threaten to slow the progress that has been made to date, and stall the incredible advancements that have been made in cancer treatment. The impact is likely to go well beyond an immediate slowdown in research, since it will reduce the workforce of new scientists embarking on research careers – these are the people who will make the breakthroughs in the decades to come. Most critical for patients, the promise of precision medicine and targeted therapies will be delayed for many, many years.

As an organization that has funded more than \$1 billion in cancer research, LLS knows firsthand the importance of funding research, and understands that the effects of these budget cuts will be widespread and much broader than just blood cancer. The reach of NIH funding extends far beyond



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Washington D.C., as the vast majority of NIH's funding supports research at universities, academic centers and medical centers around the United States.

The importance of this work cannot be overstated, as it has led to some of the most important advancements in cancer care. For example, the discovery of imatinib, a revolutionary cancer drug used in the treatment of chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), which was approved by the FDA in 2001, was supported with LLS funding, but was also funded in large part by an NCI grant. The underpinnings of this work, which won the Nobel Prize in 1989, grew out of a general understanding of the cellular machinery governing cancer cell growth. Today, nearly 90% of patients treated with imatinib in a clinical trial setting are alive five years after diagnosis, compared to the years prior to the approval of imatinib, when less than one in three patients with CML survived five years after diagnosis. This would not have happened without NCI's continual support of this work and underscores that a sustained investment in research is vitally important so tomorrow's new therapies can be achieved.

LLS supported the passage of the 21st Century Cures Act, which was passed by Congress with strong support from the patient community. This bipartisan, bicameral bill committed nearly \$5 billion in additional funding for NIH over the next 10 years, funding that is critical to sustain the current momentum to advance our understanding of the treatment of cancer, including blood cancers. By contrast, the impact of the proposed budget cuts would have a devastating and long-term impact on cancer research.

LLS urges Congress to reject these proposed budget recommendations. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

### **About LLS**

LLS is the world's largest voluntary health agency dedicated to the needs of blood cancer patients. Each year, over 150,000 Americans are newly diagnosed with blood cancers, accounting for nearly 10 percent of all newly diagnosed cancers in the United States. The LLS mission is to cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and multiple myeloma and to improve the quality of life of patients and their families.

LLS is committed to ensuring that blood cancer patients have sustainable access to quality, affordable, coordinated healthcare. LLS funds lifesaving blood cancer research, provides free information and support services, and advocates for public policies that address the needs of patients with blood cancer. Since our founding 68 years ago, LLS has invested over \$1 billion into research for cures, and LLS-funded research has been part of nearly all of the FDA-approved therapies for blood cancer.

Yours sincerely,

Bernadette O'Donoghue  
Vice President  
Office of Public Policy