

**Department of Psychology**

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Norman R. Augustine, Chair  
Scientific Management Review Board  
Office of the Director  
National Institutes of Health, Building 1  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Mr. Augustine,

I am writing in regard to the agenda for the April 27-28 Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB) meeting. I am Chair of the Friends of NIAAA, an organization created to support the mission and goals of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Our coalition represents multiple scientific and professional organizations and community advocacy groups dedicated to the prevention and treatment of alcohol abuse and dependence, as well as to the study and treatment of the various consequences related to excessive and problematic use of alcohol. As such, we are very concerned about any initiatives that would threaten or interfere with the broad scope of research and science needed to address alcohol problems in our society.

We would like to comment on the agenda item before the SMRB regarding the potential merger of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. We understand that the agenda item proposes that the SMRB initiate a study of the potential merger that would result in recommendations. Although there may be some potential benefits, the Friends of NIAAA believe that the unique nature of alcohol makes the potential merger of NIAAA and NIDA a threat to current and future science, policy and research initiatives of the agency.

We understand that there are some important cross cutting scientific issues between alcohol and drug abuse, ranging from genetics to community prevention and intervention approaches. However, alcohol differs dramatically from drugs of abuse in many critical areas, particularly with regard to control and management of distribution and use. Varying levels of legal and illegal use and the vast range of consequences where alcohol plays a role, in terms of threats to the health and well-being of society, also make alcohol unique. We believe that this uniqueness deserves a special focus within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and therefore respectfully request that the Board decline the opportunity to take further action on the merger. An amalgamation of research and policy concerns about various substances and other addictive behaviors seems to

represent a leveling process that could reduce research funding in ways that would be detrimental to the vast range of concerns represented by our constituent organizations.

This topic has been proposed and studied several times already and these discussions led to a reaffirmation of the need for separate institutes. We are certain that the currently proposed study will result in the same conclusions.

If the board determines that a study is necessary to fulfill the mission of the congressional mandate given to NIH, our objection is that the timing of such a study is problematic and prejudicial to NIAAA. Currently there is no permanent director of NIH or NIAAA. This study would need the input of a permanent director who has a vision of the future as well as a perspective on the past. Without this input the study cannot estimate potential impact on the mission of NIAAA. We strongly urge you to postpone such a study until these positions are filled and the community concerned with alcohol research, policy and practice is represented by a champion within the agency. This is not to place in doubt the competence of the interim leadership, but because there is a great difference in the perceived and real influence of interim versus permanent leadership.

In closing, we again urge you to consider our request to decline to study the merger of the NIDA and NIAAA. At the very least, we urge the Board to defer the study until leadership that would ensure a fair and full examination of the potential risks and benefits of such a merger is in place. We recognize the importance of your mission and the need to ensure that NIH is an effective, efficient and visionary organization that brings science to bear on health concerns of our nation. However, we do not believe that a study of this merger would be the best way to accomplish your mission.

Respectfully,



Carlo C. DiClemente, Ph.D.  
Chair  
Friends of NIAAA

The following Groups have agreed to co-sign this letter:

American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
Community of Concern  
National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome  
Research Society on Alcoholism