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Ellie Ehrenfeld, Ph.D.
Director, Center of Scientific Review
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Ehrenfeld:

I am writing on behalf of the American College of Epidemiology. The College was organized in 1979 to develop criteria for professional recognition of epidemiologists and to address their professional concerns. We represent epidemiologists throughout the U.S. and Canada, and a large proportion of our members are academic epidemiologists who submit grants to NIH for peer review.

We are writing this letter to strongly recommend to the Boundary Panel that it assign epidemiologists to the reorganization panel for the Fundamental Genetics & Population Biology Integrated Review Group (IRG). The equity of the peer review system can only be insured by use of panelists with expertise to review the submitted applications. However, there is considerable evidence that non-epidemiologic study sections lack members with sufficient expertise to review epidemiologic studies and to give these applications a fair review.

There are currently three epidemiology study sections that review epidemiological proposals across a range of content areas. These study sections include members with a broad range of disease expertise, but they are able to assess the research issues relevant to patterns and interactions of health and disease in populations, rather than be limited to a specific disease focus, which is more appropriate for basic and clinical sciences. For this reason we believe epidemiologic studies are currently appropriately and fairly reviewed by peers. The resulting studies have made significant advances in many areas of scientific inquiry. It is the unique perspective of these existing committees that has resulted in a successful review process and good science.

The areas of fundamental genetics & population biology cover many subject areas and scientific methodologies, a subset of which are epidemiologic. As such, it is important that the boundaries between these studies and genetic and molecular epidemiology studies be clearly drawn. Our concern is that many grant applications could be treated unfairly if the Boundary Panel's recommendations for the Fundamental Genetics & Population Biology IRG do not include an epidemiologist on the reorganization panel. The result would be poor science. We are urging you to include epidemiologists on the reorganization panel.

Sincerely,

Brian L. Strom, M.D., M.P.H.