

NAEVR EMERGING VISION SCIENTIST (EVS) ADVOCACY DAY



TJ Hollingsworth, PhD (University of Tennessee) with Congressman Steve Cohen (D-TN)

Following the September 20 AEVR events, on September 21 (see previous story) the thirty Emerging Vision Scientists (EVS) conducted 55 Congressional office visits, including several with Members of Congress, who wanted to hear directly about the concerns of early-stage investigators. NAEVR's Executive Director Dan Ignaszewski and Director of Government Relations David Epstein, along with Salewa Akintilo, Assistant Director, Science and Communications Initiatives from AVRO, each joined participants in their visits throughout the day.

Early on September 21, NAEVR picked up on the training from AEVR the day before to



From left: Pratima Suvas, PhD (Wayne State University), Sarah Shapiro, office of Senator Gary Peters (D-MI), Sneha Singh, PhD (Wayne State University), and Phuc Nguyen, PhD and Shilpa Kodata, MD, both from the University of Michigan

train EVS participants on how to combine the communications skills they learned with talking points and an ask to effectively advocate for vision research funding.

In their meetings, the EVS advocates thanked Congress for NIH/NEI funding increases between FY2016 and FY2023 and asked that Congress finalize FY2024 appropriations before the start of the fiscal year on October 1. They also cautioned about the detrimental impact that Continuing Resolutions (CRs) can have on research, including delaying awards or requiring researchers to seek “bridge” funding while awaiting funding. Advocates emphasized that if CRs are necessary, it's vital that Congress work to pass full-year funding as soon as possible.



From left: Mengyu Wang, PhD, Harvard Medical School, Mohammed Eslami, PhD, Harvard Medical School, Ananya Datta, BOptom, PhD, New England College of Optometry, Cong. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Onur Olcucu, MD, Tufts University Medical Center, and Paolo Bispo, PhD, Harvard Medical School



From left: Sriganesh Ramachandra Rao, PhD, SUNY Buffalo, Sean Ashworth, PhD, New York University Langone Health, Jasmin Palomares, office of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Brian Hofland, PhD and Diana Friedman, both from Research to Prevent Blindness, and Pooja Chauhan, PhD, New York University Langone Health



Shwetha Mangalesh, MD, Duke University, with Congresswoman Valerie Foushee (D-NC)

The advocates reiterated NAEVR's request for FY2024 NIH funding of \$50.1 billion and NEI funding of \$975 million, which is necessary to rebuild the NEI's base funding level after years of increases that have failed to keep pace with inflation. They also expressed that although the



Cammi Valdez, PhD, Northeastern State University, with Christian Gentile, office of Cong. Josh Brecheen (R-OK)

Senate-passed funding level of \$896.5 million—the same level as in FY2023—is still short of what is needed, it is preferable to the House bill. While the House bill also flat-funded the NEI, the bill makes severe cuts of over \$3 billion to the NIH funding level that would impact the ability of the NIH to conduct its mission to support the larger medical research community.

Several of the EVS participants shared a one-page graphic of their research emphasizing the potential benefit and return on the federal investment. Some participants were also able to share experiences through a virtual reality eye disease simulator in meetings to help Congressional staff understand what patients with vision loss experience.

All the participants also offered to serve as a reference on vision issues for their Congressional offices and invited Members and staff to visit their departments or School/College for lab tours.



From left: Kirk Hou, MD, PhD and Antonio Paniagua, PhD, both from the University of California Los Angeles, Sangeetha Kandoi, PhD, from the University of California San Francisco, Shreya Sirivolu and Sunny Lee, MD, PhD, both from the University of Southern California, with Priya Amilineni, office of Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA)



Neisha Rodriguez Ruiz, OD, PhD, Inter-American University of Puerto Rico