

ARVO ADVOCACY DAY

ARVO Advocates Among First to Request FY2021 NIH/NEI Funding Increases



As in past years, the early February date for the NAEVR-managed Advocacy Day associated with ARVO's Annual Meeting Planning Committee (AMPC) meeting resulted in vision researchers being among the first advocates on Capitol Hill to request FY2021 NIH/NEI funding increases. Held on February 7, the Advocacy Day also preceded the February 10 release date of the President's FY2021 budget proposal. The advocates were accompanied in office visits by NAEVR's James Jorkasky and David Epstein, as well as ARVO's Julene Joy, Erin Hering, and John Saville.

ARVO's domestic and international advocates—including AMPC members, Science Communication Training Fellows, and ARVO Advocacy and Outreach Committee Chair Peter Koulen, PhD (University of Missouri, Kansas City)—made 40 delegation office visits, including Members assigned to key committees with NIH funding and oversight jurisdiction. They thanked Congress for passing the *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019* in July 2019—which increased both defense and nondefense spending caps for FY2020 and FY2021—as well as for Congress finalizing FY2020 appropriations in December 2019 which included funding increases of \$2.6 billion for NIH and \$27.6 million for NEI. The advocates requested continued, robust funding increases for FY2021, per NAEVR's position (see left page).

Regarding NEI, the advocates described their research, highlighted potential breakthroughs, and emphasized the importance of past training grants provided by the Institute. The international advocates added their unique perspectives on the global nature of vision research, identifying their collaborations with US investigators.



The ARVO advocates included participants in its 2019-2020 Science Communications Fellows, a program managed by ARVO's Erin Hering (far left), and represented by Ruanne Vent-Schmidt, PhD (Canadian National Institute for the Blind Foundation), Andrea Waksmunski, BS (Case Western Reserve University), Jarrod Harman, BS (LSUHSC-New Orleans), Nilsu Atilgan, BA (University of Minnesota), Joshua Webb, BS (University of Maryland), Salma Ferdous, BS (Emory University), Konstantina Sampani, MD (Harvard Medical School), Amanda McLaughlin, PhD (UC Berkeley School of Optometry), and Edmund Tsui, MD (UCLA)



Below: Peter Koulen, PhD (University of Missouri, Kansas City) and Ruanne Vent-Schmidt, PhD (Canadian National Institute for the Blind Foundation) with Christiana Reasor, office of Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS)

Cong. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), right, with Jingyun Wang, PhD (Salus University of Pennsylvania)

From left: Brian Perkins, PhD (Cleveland Clinic Foundation), Colleen Cebulla, MD, PhD (Ohio State University), and Seth Gold, office of Senator Rob Portman (R-OH)

From left: Anne-Marie Boisseau, office of Cong. Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX), Cintia de Paiva, MD, PhD (Baylor College of Medicine), Lisa Ostrin, OD, PhD (University of Houston), and Andrew Carkeet, MS, PhD (Queensland University of Technology)

From left: Thomas Dorney, office of Cong. John Lewis (D-GA), Salma Ferdous, BS (Emory University) and Ross Ethier, PhD (Georgia Institute of Technology)

Below, from left: Edmund Tsui, MD (UCLA), Aurora Paik, office of Cong. Ted Lieu (D-CA), and Zia Chaudhuri, PhD (Lady Hardinge Medical College, India)

From left: Konstantina Sampani, MD (Harvard Medical School), Brianna Battle, office of Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), Tatjana Jakobs, MD (Mass Eye & Ear), Allen Clermont, MS (Harvard University) and Neena Haider, PhD (Schepens Eye Research Institute)

From left: Kara Vogel, PhD (University of Wisconsin) and Francesca Cordeiro, MD, PhD (UCL Institute of Ophthalmology), with Leslie Zelenko and Sydney Scott, office of Cong. Mark Pocan (D-WI)

NEI Updates ARVO AMPC Members



After Advocacy Day activities, AEVER's James Jorkasky (far left) hosted an educational session for the ARVO participants that engaged senior representatives from the NEI. Shefa Gordon, PhD (center), who serves as the Associate Director for Science Policy and Legislation, provided an update on key NEI programs. He was accompanied by Mary Frances Cotch, PhD

(second left) who serves as the Acting Deputy Director, and Maria Zacharias (far right), who serves as Director of Science Communications, Public Liaison, and Education. ARVO's Executive Vice President Justine Smith, PhD (second right) and Executive Director Iris Rush, CAE (third right) also participated.

Dr. Gordon announced that NEI had analyzed the awards from the sixth round of the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Technologies (BRAIN) Initiative, which is one of the programs funded through the Innovation Account designated by the *21st Century Cures Act*. For FY2019, NEI estimates that "vision" (defined as past-funded NEI investigators and researchers studying brain circuitry through the visual route) has received 80 new grants, or 44% of the 182 new grants, for a total of \$93 million in new grant funding, up from \$68 million in new grant funding in FY2018. The six-year total of new grant funding to "vision" from the BRAIN Initiative is more than \$310 million.