



August 10, 2026

The Honorable Mary Lazare
Principal Deputy Administrator
Administration for Community Living
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20201

RE: DRRC Concerns Regarding FY 2026 NIDILRR Grant Delays and the Timely Obligation of Congressionally Appropriated Research Funding

Dear Deputy Administrator Lazare:

On behalf of the undersigned organizational members of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (“DRRC”), we write to thank you for releasing multiple important Notices of Funding Opportunities (“NOFOs”) in late June and July for National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (“NIDILRR”) grant competitions, and to request information about the rationale for, and the implications of, removing the remaining Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2026 NOFOs from www.grants.gov. With only two months remaining in the fiscal year, the disability and rehabilitation research community’s growing concerns have reached a critical threshold. At this point, we seriously question whether NIDILRR will be able to obligate its full FY 2026 appropriations and maintain the continuity of the nation’s disability and rehabilitation research enterprise.

The DRRC is a coalition of national non-profit organizations committed to improving the science of medical rehabilitation, disability, and independent living. The DRRC focuses on increasing and leveraging federal resources devoted to medical rehabilitation, disability, and independent living research. Our goal is to improve the ability of individuals with disabilities to function and live as independently as possible.

As you know, DRRC has a long history of strongly supporting NIDILRR as the federal government’s premier agency for advancing disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research, developing innovative technologies, improving community living and employment opportunities, and generating the evidence needed to improve outcomes for people with disabilities. Congress has consistently recognized the importance of this mission by appropriating funding to support a diverse portfolio of disability and rehabilitation research centers, model systems, field-initiated projects, advanced research training programs, and knowledge translation initiatives. These investments support not only scientific discovery, but also the disability and rehabilitation workforce, academic medical centers, universities, and countless individuals with disabilities who ultimately benefit from these advances.

DRRC members were therefore alarmed by the removal of 36 planned FY 2026 grant competitions, representing approximately 45 percent of the Institute’s forecasted competitions and more than \$6.8 million in planned FY 2026 research investments.

Among the competitions that appear to have been canceled are every unrestricted field-initiated project (“FIP”), every Merit Switzer fellowship competition, the Small Business Innovation Research (“SBIR”) competitions, and the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (“RRTC”) on Parents with Disabilities. These are not peripheral initiatives. In fact, they represent the very programs that not only cultivate new investigators, but also encourage the creation of innovative ideas, support early career researchers, and allow the disability and rehabilitation communities to identify emerging research priorities.

Although these programs account for a relatively modest share of NIDILRR’s annual budget, they play an outsized role in sustaining the nation’s disability and rehabilitation research workforce. Fellowships and field-initiated grants are the mechanisms by which the disability and rehabilitation research community replenishes itself with new scientists, new institutions, and new ideas. Losing an entire year of these competitions does not simply delay one funding cycle; instead, it creates a gap in the research pipeline that may take years to repair.

The DRRC is also concerned by another significant policy change reflected in the FY 2026 NOFOs. Historically, Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (“DRRPs”) and Advanced Rehabilitation and Research Training (“ARRT”) grants have been awarded for five-year project periods. The newly issued competitions reduce many of these awards to three-year project periods, and while this change may reduce near-term federal obligations, it will substantially increase administrative burden for both NIDILRR and the research community at large. Grant competitions will need to be conducted far more frequently, increasing peer review and administrative costs while diverting researchers away from scientific investigation and toward more frequent grant proposal preparation. At the same time, shorter project periods will necessarily reduce the scope, rigor, and long-term impact of federally funded disability and rehabilitation research, particularly for complex longitudinal studies that require sustained investment.

For an agency whose statutory mission is to improve the lives of people with disabilities and ensure that federally funded research produces accessible knowledge, technologies, and services, these new award conditions create significant uncertainty for researchers and institutions. We are concerned that investigators may hesitate to undertake activities that have long been viewed as integral to disability and rehabilitation research, stakeholder engagement, and community participation.

Collectively, these developments raise broader questions regarding NIDILRR’s plans for the remainder of FY 2026 and FY 2027. Accordingly, ***the DRRC respectfully requests a meeting with you*** seeking clarification regarding the following:

- Does NIDILRR intend to restore any of the 36 grant competitions that have been removed from www.grants.gov?

- If not, how does the Institute intend to utilize the FY 2026 funds that had been allocated for those competitions?
- Does NIDILRR expect to obligate its full FY 2026 appropriation before September 30, 2026?
- If funding is not fully obligated, what statutory or administrative barriers are preventing the agency from doing so?
- How does NIDILRR plan to balance its research portfolio in future years if fellowships, field-initiated research grants, and other investigator-initiated competitions are not conducted as originally forecast?
- What was the rationale for reducing the duration of DRRP and ARRT awards from five years to three years?
- How does NIDILRR anticipate the new grant conditions will affect accessibility, stakeholder engagement, dissemination, and community participation activities that have historically been central to disability and rehabilitation research?
- What can the DRRC membership do to help?

The disability and rehabilitation research community would greatly benefit from greater transparency regarding NIDILRR's operational plans. Researchers, universities, rehabilitation hospitals, community partners, and individuals with disabilities are already making difficult decisions involving staffing, hiring, and research investment based upon anticipated federal funding. Continued uncertainty creates significant disruption throughout the disability and rehabilitation research ecosystem.

Congress appropriated FY 2026 funding with the expectation that NIDILRR would carry out its statutory mission by supporting high-quality disability and rehabilitation research through competitive peer-reviewed grants. Those funds should be fully obligated for their intended purpose before the close of the fiscal year. Failure to do so would have significant consequences for research institutions, investigators, rehabilitation providers, technology developers, consumers, and, most importantly, people with disabilities whose lives depend upon continued innovation.

For these reasons, *the DRRC respectfully urges NIDILRR to move expeditiously to release all of the remaining FY 2026 grant competitions, conduct timely peer review, and ensure that the Institute fully obligates the funds Congress has appropriated. We also request an opportunity to better understand NIDILRR's plans for administering the remaining FY 2026 competitions and distributing the balance of its appropriated funding over the coming months. Finally, we wish to discuss FY 2027 plans to avoid the delays and uncertainty encountered in FY 2026.*

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns and for your continued commitment to advancing disability and rehabilitation research. *We formally request an opportunity to meet with you and your staff virtually to further discuss this set of important issues and identify ways the disability and rehabilitation research community can support NIDILRR's efforts to fulfill its critical mission.* If you have any questions or if the DRRC can assist you and your

colleagues, please do not hesitate to contact Peter Thomas or Michael Barnett, DRRC Co-
Coordinators, at Peter.Thomas@PowersLaw.com or Michael.Barnett@PowersLaw.com, or by
calling 202-349-4251.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned DRRC Members:

Alliance for NIDILRR Grantees (ANG)*

American Academy of Orthotists & Prosthetists

American Association on Health and Disability*

American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine

American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association (AMRPA)

American Music Therapy Association

American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)*

American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (AOPA)

American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)*

American Spinal Injury Association

American Therapeutic Recreation Association

Association of Academic Physiatrists

Association of Rehabilitation Nurses

Brain Injury Association of America*

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation

National Neurotrauma Society

Paralyzed Veterans of America

RESNA

United Spinal Association

VisionServe Alliance

****Indicates DRRC Steering Committee Member***

CC:

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy

Secretary

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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