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David M. Barrett, JD

June 27, 2018

The Honorable Richard M. Burr  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
217 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Burr:

The American Society of Gene & Cell Therapy (ASGCT) appreciates your role in the inclusion of Section 605 to the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act of 2018 (PAHPA), S. 2852, which you sponsored. The Society supports this provision, calling for a meeting within a year from enactment to discuss the potential role that genomic engineering technologies, including gene editing, may have in advancing national health security.

ASGCT is a nonprofit professional membership organization comprised of more than 2,900 scientists, physicians, and other professionals working in gene and cell therapy. The Society is dedicated to advancing the knowledge of gene and cell therapies to alleviate human disease. Though ASGCT members focus primarily on human therapeutic applications of gene editing, the Society recognizes that this technology has the potential to contribute to additional societal benefits, which may include increasing food security and human health security. For example, gene editing could boost the ability to manage disease threats and develop counter-measures to biological weapons.<sup>1</sup>

As stated in the proceedings from an October 2017 international workshop on the security implications of genome editing, subsequent work will be required at the national, regional, and international levels to develop recommendations on these topics. Genome editing has the potential for both great positive effects on societal priorities and for inadvertent or intentional misuse. Balanced discussion of the benefits and risks of the technology among relevant stakeholders includes assessment of whether and how intentional misuse could occur and methods for prevention, preparation, and mitigation.<sup>1</sup> ASGCT acknowledges the need for continuing this conversation on a national level, as Section 605 of PAHPA would do.

ASGCT is particularly supportive of the language that calls for inclusion of representatives from academic, private, and non-profit entities with expertise in genome engineering technologies, biopharmaceuticals, medicine, or bio defense, and other relevant stakeholders in such a meeting. Including scientific researchers in these deliberations is extremely important because they are able to utilize their expertise to assess scientific feasibility of the types of activities that may pose concern, manage threats, or offer counter-measure solutions. Following its enactment, ASGCT respectfully requests the opportunity to participate in such a stakeholder meeting.

Sincerely,

David M. Barrett, JD  
Executive Director

1. Fears, R. (2017, 11-13 October). *Assessing the security implications of genome editing technology: Report of an international workshop*, Herrenhausen, Germany. Trieste, Italy: The InterAcademy Partnership.