Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

On behalf of the 24 undersigned organizations dedicated to harnessing every resource – scientific, medical, financial and educational – to fight against the scourge of cancer that threatens the lives and health of Americans, we write in strong opposition to report language accompanying H.R. 5926, the FY 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, that strikes at the heart of our joint efforts to prevent skin cancer. The report language directs the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to study the efficacy of vitamin D supplements versus “non-burning sunshine” and the issue of sunburns as the trigger for melanoma as opposed to “non-burning sunshine.”

A federally-supported study as described in the report would represent a deep and long-lasting setback in ongoing public and private efforts to prevent skin cancer. “Non-burning sunshine” is not a
scientifically-recognized term – it lacks scientific or medical validity and should not be sanctioned or studied by any government agency. The study described in the report language would negate public health efforts to educate Americans about the dangers of sun exposure and potentially lead to an increase in the incidence of lethal skin cancers. In light of the imminent danger to the public health associated with such a study, we respectfully request that this language not be included in any funding measure adopted by Congress.

The growing impact of skin cancer in the U.S. makes our concerns even more urgent. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) indicates the number of cases of melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, is increasing each year. Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. Each year in the United States, nearly 5 million people are treated for skin cancer, and the number of new skin cancer cases continues to rise. Melanoma will claim more than 10,000 lives in 2016. The annual cost of treating skin cancers in the U.S. is estimated at $8.1 billion—about $4.8 billion for non-melanoma skin cancers and $3.3 billion for melanoma. Federal actions, such as the study envisioned in the report language, that undermine public awareness of the importance of skin cancer prevention could create public confusion and ultimately harm the health and safety of Americans.

The directive in the report language for a study of “non-burning sunshine” is particularly troubling given the fact that there is no such scientific term. Sunshine is scientifically referred to as ultraviolet (UV) radiation. People are exposed to two types of UV radiation from the sun – ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB). Upon exposure to UVB radiation, the skin synthesizes a finite amount of vitamin D, which is subsequently transported into circulation. Vitamin D can, however, also be safely obtained from food and supplements. UV rays of all types can burn the skin. Studies have shown that, over time, UV exposure can, even without burning, lead to skin cancer. This directly refutes the request in the report language that calls for a study of “the issue of sunburns as the trigger for melanoma as opposed to non-burning sunshine.” The public can currently access scientifically and medically valid information through the NIH’s informational website on vitamin D intake, both for patients and providers, which carefully balances guidance for safe vitamin D intake through UV exposure and food and supplement consumption with the skin cancer risks that UV exposure entails.

While we welcome Congress encouraging the CDC to study the effects of UV radiation and safe and effective ways for the public to intake vitamin D, we do not support the legitimizing of undefined, non-scientific terms such as “non-burning sunshine.” We urge you to not include this language, and instead send a clear message to the public that Congress supports skin cancer prevention. We look forward to working with you and others in Congress and the federal government to support public health programs that build upon sound science, foster safety, and advance the public’s medical knowledge.

Sincerely,

Action to Cure Kidney Cancer
AIM at Melanoma


