Outside Witness Testimony on FY 2026 Appropriations
for the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

by the American Astronomical Society

addressing
the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA),
the National Science Foundation (NSF), and
the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)

and submitted on 13 June 2025

On behalf of the over 8,500 members of the American Astronomical Society (AAS), thank you for your strong support of the astronomical sciences—astrophysics, planetary science, and heliophysics—at NASA, NSF, and NIST. The Subcommittee's past support has resulted in world-leading observatories and missions and a vibrant research community making discovery after discovery about our place in the cosmos, our neighboring planets, and the Sun. This support has led to the development of numerous technologies that improve life for all Americans; for example, observations of distant black holes enable GPS calibration, and X-ray detectors developed for space missions are used in security monitoring and biomedical research. As Vannevar Bush stated in his report to President Truman in 1945, "The most important ways in which the Government can promote industrial research are to increase the flow of new scientific knowledge through support of basic research and to aid in the development of scientific talent."

To ensure the wisest possible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, the U.S. space science community has been recommending rank ordered priorities for facilities and programs for over 60 years through a "decadal survey" process. These assessments are commissioned by federal research agencies and carried out independently by the National Academy of Sciences. The AAS advocates for a balanced federal astronomical sciences portfolio that follows the guidance of the decadal surveys, decadal midterm reports, and other technical advice from the scientific community like senior reviews, portfolio assessments, and statutory advisory committee evaluations. These guiding inputs from the community and, most importantly, robust support from Congress have resulted in decades of leadership and discovery in the astronomical sciences.

The Administration's proposed deep cuts to NASA, NSF, and NIST in its FY2026 Budget Request—combined with what we understand to be current operating levels well below the amounts you provided in the FY2025 Full Year Continuing Resolution—will result in the surrender of our scientific leadership for at least the next generation. We will fully surrender our long-term leadership in science and technology to Asia and Europe. Other nations have made a concerted effort to emulate our past successes by building world-leading facilities that are already rivaling our own and are now taking advantage of the slow growth in U.S. basic research investment by recruiting the highly skilled professionals, who we trained, away from our institutions. The U.S. business, philanthropic, and state sectors cannot backfill such a large drop in federal investment in our field, cannot absorb most of the resultant unemployed scientists and engineers, and will not educate the future scientific and technical workforce that the private

sector needs. This budget request represents an existential crisis for basic science in the immediate term and for the entire country in the long term.

In the absence of the Administration's budget and CR actions, we would be writing to ask you for funding increases at these three agencies to implement the cutting-edge facilities and missions recommended by our community's most recent decadal surveys. The Administration is moving in the opposite direction, leaving nearly complete missions mothballed, operating missions and facilities shuttered, and the workforce decimated. The Subcommittee is in a unique position to remedy this situation and maintain the nation's global leadership in the basic sciences—the foundation upon which our economic security rests. We ask that you reject the Administration's FY2026 proposal and FY2025 operational cuts, and sustain your legacy of strong support basic science.