AMERICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

April 16, 2026

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Collins, Chair Cole, Vice Chair Murray, and Ranking Member DeLauro,

The American Astronomical Society (AAS), representing over 8,500 professional astronomers, astronomy educators, and students, is grateful for the strong support your Committees have provided to the astronomical sciences, including astrophysics, heliophysics, and the planetary sciences. Congress's continued support for these areas of research, through sustained and robust funding for our science agencies—including, for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27), **$9B for the NASA Science Mission Directorate (SMD), $9.9B for the National Science Foundation (NSF), and $9.5B for the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science (SC)**—is foundational to our country's top-class observatories, missions, and highly skilled STEM workforce.

Our community establishes priorities for each of the astronomical sciences every ten years through a consensus-based decadal survey process that is organized by the National Academies[1,2,3]. The AAS relies on these surveys, mid-decadal reports, and senior reviews to advocate for a balanced portfolio of astronomical science programs that maximizes the return on taxpayer investment. Congressional support for this process (which has enabled facilities like the James Webb Space Telescope and the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array) has established the U.S. as the global gold standard for scientific excellence.

Despite clear, bipartisan support from Congress in FY26, the AAS is concerned that these appropriated funds are not being spent as intended by Congress. Furthermore, for FY27, the astronomical sciences once again face damaging proposed cuts, including a 47% cut to NASA

[1] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2023). Pathways to Discovery in Astronomy and Astrophysics for the 2020s. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
[2] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2025). The Next Decade of Discovery in Solar and Space Physics: Exploring and Safeguarding Humanity's Home in Space. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
[3] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2023). Origins, Worlds, and Life: Planetary Science and Astrobiology in the Next Decade. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

SMD, a 55% cut to NSF, and a 13% cut to DOE SC. If enacted, these funding levels would signal an abdication of U.S. leadership in the astronomical sciences, and STEM more broadly, to international competitors. Continued uncertainty surrounding our science agencies jeopardizes our ability to recruit and retain a highly skilled workforce and stifles our nation's ability to innovate, explore, and answer fundamental questions about the universe.

While we are grateful to the Committees for rejecting the deep proposed cuts to science agencies in FY26, we must also acknowledge that U.S. scientific leadership cannot be sustained on budgets that remain flat from year to year in the face of significant inflationary pressure. We believe our funding requests below, while ambitious, are necessary to support the top priorities of the astronomy, heliophysics, and planetary science decadal surveys and maintain our nation's global leadership in discovery, technology, and innovation. We remain ready to be of assistance as the Committees works to ensure that FY26 funds are spent as directed, and that U.S. science is robustly supported in FY27.

NASA Science Mission Directorate

We respectfully request $9 billion for the Science Mission Directorate (SMD) in FY27 to cement U.S. leadership in the space sciences by advancing our understanding of the universe, including our solar system and our Sun.

In February, the SMD was directed by NASA Headquarters to pause work on 17 missions, many of which were explicitly supported by Congress in the FY26 Commerce-Justice-Science spending bill's Joint Explanatory Statement. Following the Headquarters memo, an Office of Management and Budget (OMB) footnote[4] indicated that NASA was not authorized to spend money on certain programs until NASA provides OMB with a detailed spend plan for these programs. The AAS understands these programs have since been authorized to resume (although whether funds are flowing remains unclear); however, we remain concerned by unnecessary delays and administrative overreach regarding activities already supported by Congress. Additional impacts here include the loss of more than 4,000 civil servants at the agency in 2025, and the disruption of mission-critical laboratories at the Goddard Space Flight Center. We urge the Committees to enforce guardrails and maintain oversight over NASA's spend plans to ensure that programs proceed as congressionally mandated in FY26 and FY27.

Robust support for NASA SMD in FY27 will ensure the timely launch (as early as this year) of the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope, which is fully assembled and remains under budget and ahead of schedule. The Astrophysics Division is also continuing to work on the technology maturation needed to build the Habitable Worlds Observatory (HWO), the top space-based priority of the most recent astrophysics decadal survey. The requested appropriation will also allow the astronomical community to continue transformational science with the James Webb

[4] OpenOMB (2026). National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 080-0120 2026/2027 - Science.

Space Telescope (JWST), the Hubble Space Telescope, and the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, and maximize the return on prior taxpayer investment in these missions.

Support for SMD will also enable heliophysics research that is essential for protecting our national critical infrastructure, including satellites and communication networks. A better understanding of how solar activity influences Earth's atmosphere will be achieved with missions like the Geospace Dynamics Constellation (GDC), a top priority of the two most recent heliophysics decadal surveys. The requested appropriation will also support the HelioSystems Laboratory (HSL), which will create an integrated infrastructure to make better space weather forecasts for the benefit of the U.S. military, space sector, and communications providers.

Strong funding for SMD will allow the Planetary Science Division to launch, by 2028, the Near-Earth Object (NEO) Surveyor—a space-based telescope capable of discovering and characterizing potentially Earth-impacting, hazardous objects in the Solar System. SMD also plays a critical role in supporting the scientific objectives of NASA's Artemis program by providing a better understanding of the geology and ice deposits on the Moon. In line with one of the top priorities of the most recent planetary science decadal survey, we support the return of Martian samples collected by the Perseverance rover, and we look forward to a new, cost-effective solution to transporting these critical samples to Earth.

National Science Foundation

We request $9.9 billion for NSF in FY27, including no less than FY26 levels for Research and Related Activities (R&RA) in order to support NSF research grants and the agency's world-class telescopes and facilities.

The NSF has been supporting a wide variety of science and engineering research for over 75 years and currently serves as a mainstay for our nation's STEM workforce development pipeline. For this reason, AAS is deeply concerned about reports that NSF sections across various Directorates have been significantly delayed in awarding FY26 funding for Research Experiences for Undergraduates sites, such that many programs may not take place this summer, and for multiple postdoctoral programs, including the Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowship. Although Congress appropriated sufficient funds in FY26 for these long-standing and critical workforce development programs, they were at risk of cancelation this year, and might still be operating under significantly reduced budgets relative to previous years. We urge the Committees to enact guardrails to prevent similar delays in FY27, and thereby avoid the lasting impacts on our national STEM workforce that can arise from even a few months of delays.

With the management of existing facilities having been moved out of the individual Directorates as part of NSF's recent reorganization, we also urge Congress to ensure that astronomical facilities remain a priority. The NSF builds and supports operations of the world's most

advanced ground-based telescopes. These include the NSF-DOE Vera C. Rubin Observatory, which will soon begin a ten-year survey of the night sky with unprecedented depth and identify millions of potentially hazardous asteroids within our solar system. Robust NSF funding would also support world-class solar and radio telescopes. We are grateful for Congress's direction in FY26 to advance the two partners in the U.S. Extremely Large Telescopes (US-ELT) program to final design review, as the US-ELT program will allow the U.S. to remain competitive with our international peers. Sustained investments are needed for the U.S. Antarctic Program which is a crucial part of American astronomical infrastructure, especially for cosmic microwave background (CMB) and neutrino science. Robust support for NSF also upholds the agency's astronomy-focused AI institutes—CosmicAI and SkAI—which help train a workforce that supports data science and supercomputing beneficial to all STEM disciplines.

As the only agency mandated to support all fields of fundamental science and engineering, the NSF serves as a mainstay for a multitude of STEM fields across the country. The AAS therefore urges the Committees to protect the broad array of disciplinary research done at NSF. Disciplinary research in astronomy and other fields—driven by curiosity rather than profit—leads to advances in technology and software that subsequently support the private sector and national security. To best support disciplinary research, we urge the Committees to protect discipline-specific grant programs, including the Astronomy and Astrophysics Grants (AAG), a flexible funding program to support astronomy research, and the Advanced Technologies and Instrumentation (ATI) program, which supports the development of advanced technology and specialized instrumentation for ground-based astronomy.

Department of Energy Office of Science

We request $9.5 billion for the DOE SC to support the full spectrum of science at DOE, including high-energy physics research on cosmic evolution.

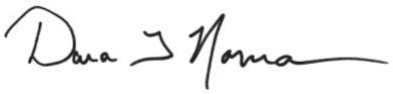
DOE SC is critical to U.S. innovation and supports a wide array of science. Within the Cosmic Frontier program, DOE SC led the construction of the camera for the Rubin Observatory, which is the largest digital camera ever built. The High Energy Physics Office also supports the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI), which uncovered hints of evolving dark energy in results released last year. DOE SC has partnered with NASA to build the Lunar Surface Electromagnetics Experiment (LuSEE)-Night mission to detect the universe's earliest radio signals from the far side of the Moon, as well as the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer (AMS), which studies cosmic ray events in low Earth orbit on the International Space Station (ISS). DOE SC also plays a key role in CMB science in Antarctica.

DOE SC is using its vast astronomical datasets to train and catalyze discoveries using AI as part of the Genesis Mission. Within astronomy, Genesis will allow for an increased pace of discovery in response to the trove of incoming data from large sky surveys, including Rubin, DESI, and Roman. As noted in the most recent Astronomy and Astrophysics Advisory Committee (AAAC)

report[5], "Genesis will significantly boost these efforts across all Cosmic Frontier projects, resulting in an accelerated pace of discovery and enabling a broader range of 'Big Data' analyses not possible conventionally."

With your support for our science agencies, including NSF, NASA SMD, and DOE SC, we will continue to lead the world in astronomical discoveries. These investments will advance technology development across a range of sectors, while also inspiring and training the next generation of scientists and engineers to support a healthy U.S. STEM workforce. Thank you again for your support, and for your time and consideration of these priorities.

Sincerely,



Dara Norman, PhD
President, American Astronomical Society

[5] Astronomy and Astrophysics Advisory Committee (March 2026). Astronomy and Astrophysics Advisory Committee Annual Report for 2025-2026. National Academies.