AMERICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

April 23, 2026

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman, Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman, House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Grace Meng
Ranking Member, House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Moran, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Van Hollen, and Ranking Member Meng,

The American Astronomical Society (AAS), representing over 8,500 professional astronomers, astronomy educators, and students, is grateful for the strong support your Subcommittees 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—we hope including **$9B for the NASA Science Mission Directorate (SMD), $9.9B for the National Science Foundation (NSF), and $1.283 billion for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Scientific and Technical Research Services (STRS) in FY 2027**—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 and commissioned by the agencies[1,2,3]. The AAS relies on these surveys, mid-decadal reports, and senior reviews to advocate for a balanced portfolio that maximizes the return on taxpayer investment. Congressional support for this process has established the U.S. as the global gold standard leader for scientific excellence. Your Subcommittees' support has led to the successful development of the NSF-DOE Vera C. Rubin Observatory and the upcoming launch (ahead of schedule and on budget) of NASA's Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope, both priorities of the 2010 Astronomy and Astrophysics Decadal Survey. We look forward to continuing to work with

[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.

you to advance the top priorities of the most recent astrophysics, planetary science, and heliophysics decadal surveys.

FY 2026 Execution Concerns

The AAS is deeply concerned by the Administration's slow expenditure of appropriated funds despite the clear, bipartisan support from Congress in FY26. Apparent administrative overreach and delays have placed a number of critical workforce development programs at risk, including the NSF Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) program (for which many host sites across various sections at NSF have not yet heard back about their funding for this summer) and several NSF postdoctoral programs, including the Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowship (for which awards were made more than a month later than previous years and after many awardees had already accepted other positions). It is also not yet clear whether these programs are operating on significantly reduced budgets compared to previous years. We are troubled by the manner in which these programs were threatened despite the fact that sufficient topline funding was appropriated by Congress to ensure that such long-standing and critical programs continue. We urge the Subcommittees to explicitly state support for such programs and enact guardrails to ensure that similar delays or worse do not take place in FY27.

Moreover, we have seen significant uncertainty and administrative overreach for missions that have explicit support in the FY26 bills. In February, the Science Mission Directorate 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 (including many of the programs listed in the memo) until NASA provided OMB with detailed spend plans for these programs.[5] While AAS understands these programs have since been authorized to resume (although whether funds are flowing remains unclear), 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 Subcommittees to enforce guardrails and maintain oversight over the agencies' spend plans to ensure that programs proceed as congressionally mandated in FY26 and FY27.

FY 2027 AAS Requests

The astronomical sciences once again face damaging proposed cuts in FY27, including a 47% cut to NASA SMD and a 55% cut to NSF. 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

[4] OpenOMB (2026). National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 080-0120 2026/2027 - Science.
[5] The ten programs listed in the footnote include the Geospace Dynamics Constellation (GDC), OSIRIS-APEX, the Chandra X-ray Observatory, the Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA), Astrophysics Probe Program, VERITAS, DAVINCI, and Science Activation.

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 Subcommittees for rejecting the proposed existential cuts to the sciences in FY26, we must also acknowledge that US 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 Subcommittees work to ensure that FY26 funds are spent as directed, and that U.S. science is robustly supported in FY27.

Below, we describe our FY27 requests for NASA SMD, NSF, and NIST, and the world-leading science and workforce development that these funding levels would enable.

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.

Astrophysics

Robust support for NASA SMD in FY27 will ensure the timely launch of the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope, which is fully assembled and remains under budget and ahead of schedule. This mission, the top space-based priority of the 2010 Astronomy and Astrophysics Decadal Survey, is set to launch as early as September 2026 and will soon begin transforming our understanding of dark energy while simultaneously discovering approximately 100,000 new planets around other stars. 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 astronomy and astrophysics decadal survey. Early investment in such technology maturation helps ensure HWO will remain on budget and on schedule as NASA begins to build the world-class infrastructure needed to directly image Earth-like planets in the habitable zones of their stars. Support for NASA Astrophysics will also allow the astronomical community to continue to do transformational science with the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), which within the last year has helped determine the odds of an asteroid colliding with the Moon,[6] better characterized the atmosphere of an exoplanet that could host life,[7] and discovered a potential formation mechanism for black holes.[8] The Astrophysics Division also supports the Hubble Space Telescope and the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, which continue to produce world-leading science, as affirmed by the most recent Astrophysics Senior Review.[9] The

[6] NASA Science Blog (March 2026). How NASA's Webb Helped Rule Out Asteroid's Chance of 2032 Lunar Impact.
[7] NASA Science Article (September 2025). NASA Webb Looks at Earth-Sized, Habitable-Zone Exoplanet TRAPPIST-1e.
[8] NASA Science Article (July 2025). NASA's Webb Finds Possible 'Direct Collapse' Black Hole.
[9] NASA Astrophysics Senior Review Panel (March 2025). 2025 Astrophysics Senior Review Report.

requested funds will maintain a steady cadence of low- and mid-cost missions, such as Explorers and Probes, to support a balanced mission portfolio.

Heliophysics

Heliophysics research is critical for protecting our national infrastructure, including satellites and communication networks, especially as we experience a time of heightened solar activity including solar flares and geomagnetic storms. The Geospace Dynamics Constellation (GDC) is a top priority of the two most recent Heliophysics decadal surveys, and continued support from Congress will allow GDC to enhance our understanding of the processes that impact Earth's upper atmosphere, including the layers that protect our planet from harmful radiation. Robust support for Heliophysics will also support the development of HelioSwarm, a 9-spacecraft system that will work as a unit to measure fluctuations in the solar wind and Earth's magnetic field, and the HelioSystems Laboratory, which will create an integrated, interagency infrastructure to enable better space weather forecasts and predictions for the benefit of the U.S. military, space sector, and communications providers. NASA recently launched ESCAPADE, which is the first mission to explore the solar wind around Mars—essential preparation for future manned missions to the red planet.

Planetary Science

Strong funding for Planetary Science will allow NASA to continue working on the Near-Earth Object Surveyor—a space-based telescope capable of discovering and characterizing potentially Earth-impacting, hazardous objects in the Solar System—with a target launch date of late 2027. The Planetary Science Division's Lunar Discovery and Exploration Program 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. Robust support for Planetary Science will also allow NASA to continue development on future missions, including the Uranus Orbiter and Probe, the next planetary flagship mission outlined in the decadal survey, and Dragonfly, an octocopter that will launch in 2028 to study organic chemistry on Saturn's largest moon, Titan.

National Science Foundation

We request $9.9 billion for NSF in FY27, including no less than enacted FY26 levels for Research and Related Activities (R&RA), in order to support NSF research grants and the agency's world-class telescopes and other research facilities. We also urge the Subcommittees to support the consolidated Astronomy and Astrophysics Research Grants (AAG) program at no less than the summed FY24 levels for AAG and Advanced Technologies and Instrumentation (ATI), and to support the Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowship (AAPF) program at no less than FY24 levels. We reiterate our concern over delays to important workforce development programs at NSF, and urge the Subcommittees to enact guardrails for FY27, and thereby avoid the lasting impacts on our national STEM workforce that can arise from even a few months of delays. We request that the Subcommittees explicitly support the various

workforce development programs at NSF, including REUs, the Graduate Research Fellowships Program (GRFP), and postdoctoral fellowships (such as AAPF) at no less than FY24 enacted levels.

With the management of facilities moving out of Directorates and into the Research Infrastructure Office as part of NSF's reorganization[10], 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, used by our community to produce unparalleled datasets which are key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe. These include the NSF-DOE Vera C. Rubin Observatory, which will soon begin a ten-year survey of the night sky with unprecedented depth, generating 10 terabytes of rich astronomical data every night. Robust NSF funding will also support world-class solar telescopes, like the Daniel K. Inuoye Solar Telescope (DKIST) to study the fine-scale structure of the Sun, as well as the premier radio observatories operated by the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO). Within NRAO, robust support for NSF will allow for the timely construction of the Next Generation Very Large Array (ngVLA), which will strengthen our understanding of neutron star mergers, the formation of stars and planets, and galactic evolution, as well as the cosmic reference frame that underpins the Global Positioning System (GPS). We are also grateful for Congress's support in FY26 to advance the two partners in the U.S. Extremely Large Telescope (US-ELT) program to final design review, as the US-ELT program is the top ground-based priority of the most recent decadal survey for astronomy and astrophysics and will allow the U.S. to remain competitive with our international peers.

The U.S. Antarctic Program, managed by the NSF, is a crucial part of American astronomical infrastructure, especially for cosmic microwave background (CMB) and neutrino science. The AAS was disappointed in the decision by NSF and the Department of Energy to cancel the CMB Stage 4 (CMB-S4) project, which would have built an array of sensitive microwave telescopes in Antarctica and Chile's Atacama Desert to probe the early universe. In view of this cancellation, we urge the Subcommittees to support continued efforts by the NSF to sustain southern-hemisphere CMB science through maintenance and upgrades of the South Pole Telescope (SPT-3G), the Simons Observatory, and the BICEP array, as well as supporting the outstanding work being done by the IceCube Neutrino Observatory.

Astronomy serves as a "gateway science" that inspires thousands of students to enter STEM fields every year. Our students and researchers gain unique skills transferable to national security and emerging technology. For example, astronomers are leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) to process massive datasets through the NSF-Simons AI Institutes for Astronomical Sciences—CosmicAI and SkAI—which are not only driving scientific breakthroughs but are training a workforce that supports data science and supercomputing across 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 Subcommittees to protect the broad array of disciplinary research done at NSF.

[10] National Science Foundation (December 2025). NSF announces reorganizational realignment.

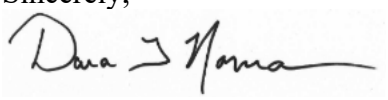
Disciplinary research—driven by curiosity rather than profit—in astronomy and other fields leads to advancements in technology and software that subsequently bolster the private sector and national security. To best support disciplinary research, we urge the Subcommittees to protect discipline-specific grant programs including AAG, a flexible funding program to support astronomy research. As of FY26, AAG also supports work previously under the ATI program on the development of advanced technology and specialized instrumentation for ground-based astronomy. We urge the Subcommittees to support the consolidated AAG program at levels no less than the summed FY24 levels for AAG and ATI.

National Institute of Standards and Technology

We respectfully request $1.283 billion in base funding for NIST Scientific and Technical Research and Services (STRS) in FY27. NIST develops and implements standards and advanced measurement techniques critical to astronomical research. We were gravely concerned by the Administration's decision to terminate the Atomic Spectroscopy Group (ASG) last year, though we are grateful that ASG was able to continue operations at NASA Goddard. We urge the Subcommittees to ensure that other critical science-enabling functions at NIST are not lost in FY26 and FY27.

Thank you again for your support, and for your time and consideration of these priorities.

Sincerely,



Dara Norman, PhD
President, American Astronomical Society

This composite image from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) reveals the Cat's Paw Nebula (NGC 6334) taken with JWST's Near-Infrared Camera (NIRCam) as released to the public in July 2025. The nebula is located ~4,000 light years from Earth and is home to a large and active star-forming region. The light blue areas show the locations of massive young stars shining brightly and carving away at the nearby dust and gas. Source: https://science.nasa.gov/asset/webb/cats-paw-nebula-nircam-image/