Dear Appropriations Leaders,

On behalf of The Optical Society (OSA), I write in support of the University of Rochester’s Laboratory for Laser Energetics (LLE) and urge the committee to reject the President’s proposed fiscal year (FY) 2019 budget and provide $80 million to sustain LLE activities in FY19. Since 1916, OSA has been the world’s leading champion for optics and photonics, uniting and educating scientists, engineers, educators, technicians and business leaders worldwide to shape real-life applications and accelerate achievements in the science of light.

The University of Rochester’s Laboratory for Laser Energetics is a world-renowned center for high-power laser research and advanced optical and photonic technologies. LLE is a vital contributor to national security, an invaluable source of scientific education and leadership and key to strategic work on an independent energy future. The OMEGA lasers (Omega and Omega EP) are the largest and most capable found at any academic institution in both the United States and worldwide.

A recent report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, entitled “Opportunities in Intense Ultrafast Lasers: Reaching for the Brightest Light” points out that the U.S. is losing ground in a second laser revolution of highly intense, ultrafast lasers that have broad applications in manufacturing, medicine, and national security. Currently, between 80 to 90 percent of the high-intensity laser systems are overseas, and all of the highest power research lasers currently in construction or already built are overseas as well. The report makes recommendations that would improve the nation’s position in the field, including for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to create a broad network to support science, applications and technology of these lasers. Enacting the drastic cuts proposed in the
President’s FY19 budget would further negatively affect the ability for the U.S to regain its previous leadership.

Over 360 skilled scientists, engineers, and technicians are currently involved in the program. The DOE has also designated the LLE as the National Laser User’s Facility (NLUF), which allows the LLE to host more than 400 scientists and 100 graduate students from 55 universities, to carry out fundamental research, training and education. The proposed budget reduction will have an impact on the training of the current and future workforce working in High Energy Density Physics who are highly qualified to evaluate the safety and reliability of our nuclear stockpile.

I thank you for your support and urge you to reject the President’s proposal and provide the $75 million in FY18 and $80 million in FY19 to support the University of Rochester’s Laboratory for Laser Energetics (LLE).

Sincerely,

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