



November 21, 2025

The Honorable Roger Wicker, Chairman
United States Senate
Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed, Ranking Member
United States Senate
Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Re: Oppose Restrictive Research Collaboration Language in the FY 2026 National
Defense Authorization Act

Dear Chairman Wicker and Ranking Member Reed:

On behalf of the Seismological Society of America (SSA), I write to express our concern over proposed provisions of Section 220C and the SAFE Research Act in the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would prohibit the Department of Defense from funding fundamental research conducted in collaboration with certain foreign academic institutions. Section 1732a in the SAFE Research Act extends this language to research-funding agencies outside of the Department of Defense. This language risks unintended harm to US science, innovation and national security by constraining open, unclassified research that underpins our hazard-monitoring and public-safety missions.

SSA is a nonprofit professional society representing more than 2,600 scientists, engineers, and students working to advance earthquake science for the protection of lives and infrastructure. Many of our members conduct research at U.S. universities and laboratories whose work depends on global seismic data and international collaboration. The sharing of these data is fundamental to earthquake early warning, tsunami detection, and nuclear-test monitoring and does not involve sensitive or classified technology. Limiting collaboration would reduce the accuracy and coverage of these networks, slow hazard assessments, and weaken U.S. readiness.

Long-standing U.S. policy recognizes the distinction between fundamental and classified research. National Security Decision Directive 189 (NSDD-189), issued in 1985 and reaffirmed by successive administrations, draws a bright line between fundamental research and classified research and clearly states that “to the maximum extent possible, the products of fundamental research remain unrestricted,” and that when national security requires control, “the



mechanism for control of information generated during federally funded fundamental research in science, technology, and engineering at colleges, universities, and laboratories is classification.” This policy ensures that open, unclassified research supporting public missions—like seismic monitoring—is not subject to ad-hoc or affiliation-based restrictions.

By moving away from the framework of NSDD-189, the proposed NDAA language risks introducing de facto classification into areas that Congress has historically treated as open science. It would force universities and agencies to impose new compliance layers, discourage international participation, and slow the development of next-generation hazard-detection and resilience technologies. In addition, the proposed restrictions would detrimentally impact international participation in U.S. research programs and graduate education, undermining the very workforce development goals Congress has championed through USGS, NSF and DOE programs. Overly broad definitions of covered entities could disqualify talented students and researchers with no connection to national security risks, while imposing new burdens on universities and agencies. The result would not be greater security, but rather fragmented networks, delayed innovation, and reduced U.S. leadership in a domain where global cooperation is indispensable.

We respectfully urge Congress to reaffirm the principles of NSDD-189 and adjust the proposed language included in the 2026 NDAA to ensure that national-security protections remain targeted, evidence-based, and consistent with the open-research standards that have long advanced U.S. scientific and strategic interests. We further encourage committees to consult with scientific organizations, including SSA, whose work demonstrates how international data collaboration directly supports national safety and security.

Thank you for your continued commitment to U.S. scientific excellence and resilience. SSA and its members stand ready to provide technical insight or additional information as Congress considers this important issue.

Sincerely,

Susan Bilek, Ph.D.

President, Seismological Society of America