February 9, 2012

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Issa and Ranking Member Cummings:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express strong opposition to H.R. 3699, the Research Works Act. This bill would repeal the successful National Institutes of Health (NIH) Public Access Policy, a hard-fought-for policy that secured no-fee public access to NIH’s taxpayer-funded research. The legislation would also block the development of similar public access policies at other federal agencies.

The NIH Public Access Policy has resulted in the provision of access to more than a half a million individual users each day, including health care professionals, patients, caregivers and their families. These users rely on the no-fee accessibility of this information to improve their understanding of the medical conditions they are facing as well as their quality of care.

As members of the public whose tax dollars underwrite this research, we expect that crucial details of the most recent medical advancements in these areas are made available to us, and to the doctors and caregivers whose responsibilities are the health and long life of all Americans. This legislation would deny us that access. The effect of this bill also would be felt in areas beyond biomedical research.

H.R. 3699 would affect access to scientific research underwritten by all other federal agencies. Access to critical information on energy, the environment, climate change, and hundreds of other areas that directly affect the lives and well-being of the public would be unfairly and unwisely limited by this proposed legislation.

Our federal government funds research with the expectation that the resulting ideas and discoveries will propel science, stimulate the economy, and improve the lives of all Americans. Scientific progress depends on the broadest possible dissemination of knowledge, and the ability to build upon the work of others. Congress should be focused on improving the economy and ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and effectively. The NIH Public Access Policy has a proven track record of delivering positive benefits to the public, while holding the government accountable for public investment in scientific research; H.R. 3699 would lead to exactly the opposite effect.

Thank you for considering our views. Please contact me if you need further information.

Sincerely,

American Association of University Professors
American Historical Association
American Library Association
Association of American Physicians and Surgeons
Californians Aware
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington – CREW
Community Research
Cost of Government Center
Defending Dissent Foundation
Demand Progress
Doctor Patient Medical Association
Essential Information
Humanist Society of New Mexico
iSolon.org
Mine Safety and Health News
National Coalition Against Censorship
National Coalition for History
OMB Watch
OpenTheGovernment.org
Progressive Librarians Guild
Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
Rutherford Institute
Sage Information Services
Society of American Archivists
Society of Professional Journalists
Special Libraries Association
Tully Center for Free Speech at Syracuse University
Utah Foundation for Open Government
Washington Coalition for Open Government
William A. Wise Law Library at the University of Colorado Law School