

May 26, 2005

The Honorable Ralph Regula, Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Room 2358, Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515-6024

Dear Representative Regula:

We are writing on behalf of the Medical Library Association (MLA) to express our support for PubChem, a chemical structure database established in 2004 by the National Institutes of Health as part of the NIH Roadmap Initiative.

PubChem organizes information about the biological activities of chemical compounds in a comprehensive biomedical database. Developed and maintained by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) at the National Library of Medicine (NLM), PubChem is one of several databases included in the NIH Roadmap Initiative that seeks to further our understanding of the complexity of biological systems, stimulate interdisciplinary research teams, and reshape clinical research to accelerate medical discovery and improve our nation's health. For example, NCBI plays an active and collaborative role in further deciphering the human genome. Analysis of the draft human genome sequence has already led to the identification of genes for cystic fibrosis, breast cancer, hereditary deafness, and skeletal disorders, among others. PubChem, as part of this collection of NCBI databases, enhances the ability of researchers to access chemical structure data that will advance development of new treatments and medications for disease and enable the integration of data (chemical structures with full text with data sets) for a complete, deep resource. Thus PubChem becomes a unique and effective tool for those working on biomedical research problems.

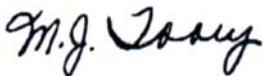
MLA has always maintained that having access to timely, relevant, and accurate information is vital to the health of our nation and to education and research—a premise that has been supported in the scientific literature. Further, the association maintains that government-generated information is a public good, and, because it is generated with public funds, it must be disseminated to the public with as few barriers as possible. For this reason, we are concerned by the call from the American Chemical Society (ACS) for NIH to unreasonably restrict PubChem simply because ACS believes that PubChem threatens the financial viability of ACS's Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS). Also, MLA supports NIH's belief that PubChem and the CAS databases are complementary and not duplicative and that PubChem does not present a threat to the financial well being of

CAS. NIH staff conducted an analysis to compare PubChem and CAS and found that CAS contains detailed information on approximately 25 million unique chemicals while PubChem contains information on only 650,000 unique chemicals, less than 3% of CAS's coverage.

NIH also believes that CAS—a valuable resource for chemists—could be a valuable resource for biomedical researchers who currently do not focus on the information organized in CAS. We understand that NIH officials wish to collaborate with the ACS to make this possible. Therefore, MLA encourages ACS and NIH to find ways to collaborate on this issue and maintain their respective databases, so that the scientific community and public can both benefit.

MLA, a nonprofit, educational organization, is comprised of health sciences information professionals with more than 4,500 members worldwide. Through its programs and services, MLA provides lifelong educational opportunities, supports a knowledgebase of health information research, and works with a global network of partners to promote the importance of quality information for improved health to the health care community and the public.

Sincerely,



M.J. Tooley, AHIP
President
Medical Library Association



Carla J. Funk, CAE
Executive Director
Medical Library Association