

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 2, 2017

The Honorable James Risch
Chairman
Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Committee
428A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Committee
428A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Shaheen,

As you begin to look at reauthorizing pilots with the Small Business Innovation Research legislation, we write to express our strong support for the inclusion of the Phase 0 Proof of Concept partnership pilot.

The Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer (SBIR/STTR) program is a key federal investment for these researchers and entrepreneurs. With over 22 percent of America's top innovations stemming from companies that have received SBIR grants, the SBIR program is vital to our nation's competitiveness—particularly as the rate of startup creation in the United States has fallen to 12th among developed nations, nearing the lowest it has been in 30 years.

The Phase 0 Proof of Concept Partnership Pilot, which was authorized in 2011, was intended to fill the gap that start-up companies face as they begin the process of commercializing their ideas. The National Institutes of Health (NIH), created the NIH Research Evaluation and Commercialization Hubs (REACH) in light of the Phase 0 Proof of Concept Partnership Pilot. The REACH program was designed to accelerate the translation of scientific discovery into commercial products that improve health for patients.

Currently, three REACH Hubs have received funding, including the Long Island Bioscience Hub, the University of Louisville Expediting Commercialization, Innovation, Translation and Entrepreneurship (ExCITE), and the University of Minnesota MN-REACH. Each hub focuses on bringing to market different, innovative healthcare solutions that our country desperately needs. Focusing on therapies, the Center for Biotechnology has funded projects that would suppress colon cancer cells, treat drug resistant TB patients, and provide treatment that could significantly increase the overall survival rates in patients with certain cancers. Through the assistance of the REACH program over just 24 months, the Center for Biotechnology has launched seven companies, filed 30 patent applications, and has helped entrepreneurs file over 50 SBIR/STTR proposals, among other commercialization activities. At the University of Minnesota, MN-REACH has awarded grants to help commercialize research regarding using gut bacteria to predict whether cancer patients will be susceptible to blood infections during chemotherapy, using a new method of producing large quantities of insulin-producing pancreas cells for transplant into people with diabetes, and developing an immunotherapy for HIV.

We ask that the Phase 0 Proof of Concept Partnership be extended past its sunset and receive funding accordingly, allowing for this approach to advancing innovation and commercialization to receive the federal support necessary to underscore its effectiveness and role in the federal government's mission to translate more research into new companies and new jobs.

We appreciate the Committee looking at these programs and look forward to working with you on this matter.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Al Franken
Al Franken
United States Senator