

June 24, 2024

**For the attention of: Dr. Imbasciani, PhD, MD, Chair, Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee (ICOC)**

Dear Dr. Imbasciani and Members of the Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee,

We are writing to express our concern regarding the recent funding outcomes announced at the last ICOC meeting (May 30th, 2024), specifically concerning the TRAN grant mechanism. As you know, six grants were left unfunded despite achieving fundable scores, a situation unprecedented in any of the past grant cycles. However, we feel that this situation could be resolved considering the next tranche of CIRM funding is to be approved at the June 27th ICOC meeting.

A fundable score, traditionally set at 85 and above, has always ensured that deserving projects receive the necessary financial support. On some previous occasions, even some grants scoring below 85 have secured funding. The decision to leave six grants unfunded, all of which met the established criteria, is a significant departure from this standard. We propose that the ICOC should prioritize approving these six grants recommended by the grants working group for funding.

The process of resubmitting a grant that has already been reviewed and deemed exceptional is not fair to the CIRM staff nor the grant reviewers. It effectively wastes resources on all parts. Therefore, moving these grants to be funded when funding becomes available will certainly avoid a pileup of applications in the next round.

This current funding shortfall and push to resubmit will inevitably delay the development of critical therapeutics and add unnecessary review burden to the grants working group. The projects deemed fundable are poised to make substantial contributions in the areas of chronic pain, Huntington's disease, Timothy syndrome, Angelman syndrome, glioblastoma, and Parkinson's. Any delay in their progress could hinder advancements that patients desperately need. Patients are waiting, and every setback in funding translates directly to a delay in potential treatments reaching those who could benefit most. The immediate release of funds from the budget for the next financial year to support the grants already recommended for funding would immediately prevent this distressing delay.

Moreover, the impact on future grant cycles cannot be ignored. Of the 50 grants submitted, 29 advanced to scientific review, and 16 received fundable scores. If we allow this shortfall to persist, it sets a concerning precedent that might lead to a rolling process where fundable grants repeatedly go unfunded. Such a pattern would undermine the very purpose of the CIRM and its commitment to supporting and accelerating pioneering research in regenerative medicine.

To address this funding gap, we note that the shortfall is about \$27 million for the six unfunded grants. The program summary for the next CIRM meeting indicates that the

CLIN program will have \$14.8 million unused for this fiscal year. For our TRAN program, after the last round with the 10 grants, there was a little over \$1 million left. Between these two, there is \$16 million total left. The ICOC would only need to make up the difference of around \$10-11 million in the next budget. Highlighting that the surplus in one area may be used to minimize the apparent effect on the budget could be one solution.

We also suggest referencing the CIRM Neuro Task Force presentation on June 13th, where they discuss allocating the \$1.13 billion remaining funding dedicated to Neuroscience. Notably, the six unfunded grants are all in the neuro category. Funding these grants deemed exceptional and falling into this category would be a prudent use of these funds.

Therefore, we strongly urge CIRM to fund these six grants with the budget approved in the June 27th ICOC meeting. Ensuring that all fundable grants receive the support they have earned is not only fair but crucial for maintaining the momentum of therapeutic development and preserving the trust of the research community.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to your prompt response and to the continued support of groundbreaking research in regenerative medicine.

**Sincerely,**

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