February 10, 2015

Sen. Lisa Murkowski  
Chairperson  
Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators,

As the President of the Health Physics Society, I am writing you to express the Society’s strong support of H. R. 35, the Low-Dose Radiation Research Act of 2015, which passed the House of Representatives on January 7, 2015.

The Health Physics Society is a nonprofit scientific professional organization with over 4,000 members nationwide whose mission is excellence in the science and practice of radiation safety. Since its formation in 1956, the Society has represented the largest radiation safety society in the world, with a membership that includes scientists, safety professionals, physicists, engineers, attorneys, and other professionals from academia, industry, medical institutions, state and federal government, the national laboratories, the military, and other organizations. Society activities include encouraging research in radiation science, developing standards,
and disseminating radiation safety information. Society members are involved in understanding, evaluating, and controlling the potential risks from radiation relative to the benefits it offers the general population.

As passed by the House of Representatives, H.R 35 ensures the continuance and enhancement of the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Low-Dose Radiation Research Program, which focuses on the health effects of ionizing radiation in the low dose range. The bill also directs the National Academies of Science to formulate a long-term strategy to resolve the extent to which low-dose radiation may pose health risks to humans, and requires DOE to develop a five-year research plan that responds to the Academies’ recommendations.

A greater understanding of the effects of low dose radiation on humans will not only add to our body of knowledge on the subject but it will also enable us to make better decisions on what are the proper levels, procedures, and protections needed when our citizens are subject to exposure to sources of low dose radiation.

Previously, while the program was fully funded by DOE, great strides were made in understanding the biological responses of human (and other animal) cells to low dose radiation. The research identified several protective responses by the cells exposed to low dose radiation, in contrast to the damaging changes in cells induced by high radiation dose. It is critical that additional research be conducted to link these responses at the cellular level to changes in cancer frequency in humans. The United States was once the leader in radiobiology research, but due to DOE’s decision to withhold funding from the program, we have fallen woefully behind, and the vast amounts of data generated by the research already performed is sitting idle, waiting for more study and analysis.
Please feel free to get back to me with any questions you may have on this legislation or any subject involving radiation safety. Both the entire Health Physics Society and myself stand ready to assist you as issues of radiation safety come before you and your staffs.

Sincerely,

Barbara L Hamrick, CHP, JD
President, Health Physics Society