NSF for the Future Act Amendment to Include Graduate Student Mental Health Clause

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the nearly 7,000 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). We support policies that recognize, foster, and support student mental health and wellbeing as being foundational to the success of our academic institutions. We urge Congress to recognize the graduate student mental health crisis and include funding to investigate its root causes in the NSF for the Future Act, H.R. 2225.

The growing crisis of graduate student mental health is well documented by the NASEM report Mental Health, Substance Use, and Wellbeing in Higher Education: Supporting the Whole Student, ACHA National College Health Assessment II, and the Nature PhD Students Survey. Graduate students are six times more likely to experience anxiety or depression than the general population, with the dropout rates for graduate students with a mental health disorder ranging from 43-86%. The root causes of this crisis need to be investigated and addressed before our campuses and communities lose more bright minds.

Amending section 5.c.1.E of the NSF for the Future Act to include a clause focused on assessing the prevalence of graduate student mental health challenges, understanding their root causes, and developing effective interventions would begin to address the significant gap in knowledge and effective interventions that exist with respect to graduate student mental health. We also feel that this amendment recognizing the graduate student mental health crisis bolsters the NSF for the Future Act’s commitment to supporting and developing the STEM workforce, enabling American innovation to thrive.

We look forward to working with you to address the growing graduate student mental health crisis. If you would like to know more about the importance of graduate students and the role we play in the research enterprise, please reach out to us at gsc-eab-fed@mit.edu.

Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council. June 2021