



Solve M.E.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Docket No. OMB-2026-0034

Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance (Proposed Rule, 91 FR 32198, May 29, 2026)

Submitted by:

Emily Taylor, CEO & President

Solve M.E. (Solve ME/CFS Initiative)

etaylor@solvecfs.org | solvecfs.org

Date: June 30, 2026

Introduction

Solve M.E. (Solve ME/CFS Initiative) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1987 and headquartered in Los Angeles, California. We are the leading patient advocacy and research catalyst organization for myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) and related infection-associated chronic conditions, including Long COVID. According to the CDC, an estimated 3.3 million Americans have ME/CFS, many who are housebound or bedbound due to the severity of the illness. There are not yet any FDA-approved treatments or definitive diagnostic tests available for ME/CFS. ME/CFS costs the U.S. economy an estimated \$18 to \$51 billion annually in medical costs and lost productivity.

We submit this comment in strong opposition to the Office of Management and Budget's proposed revisions to the OMB Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance in title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, as published in the Federal Register on May 29, 2026. Solve M.E. has a long history of bipartisan engagement on behalf of patients, and we write in that spirit here. The provisions described below would cause serious harm to the federal biomedical research infrastructure regardless of one's political perspective, undermining taxpayer return on investment, ceding American scientific leadership to international competitors, and imposing new bureaucratic burdens that would slow rather than accelerate results for patients.

I. This Rule Would Weaken American Scientific Competitiveness

The United States is engaged in an intensifying global competition for scientific and biomedical leadership. That competition is not abstract. Germany has just committed €500 million to post-infectious disease research, including ME/CFS and Long COVID, over the next decade. China's share of global high-quality scientific output has grown substantially while the U.S. share has declined. The administration's own FY2027 R&D priorities memo identifies biotechnologies and biomanufacturing as "critical to strengthening and safeguarding American health." The proposed rule works against that goal in three direct ways:

- **Political appointee override of peer review (§200.205) would advantage our competitors.** Independent expert peer review is not a partisan institution, it is the merit-based system that has made American biomedical science the envy of the world. Countries competing with the United States for scientific leadership evaluate grants on scientific merit. The proposed requirement that senior political appointees conduct pre-issuance reviews of every discretionary grant and ensure that they demonstrably advance the President's policy priorities (§200.205(b)), and that peer review recommendations be explicitly treated as non-binding (§200.205(d)), would introduce a political filter that other nations' research agencies do not impose. American scientists already face increasing



Solve M.E.

recruitment pressure from institutions abroad. Signaling that U.S. grant funding will be allocated in part by political criteria rather than scientific merit will accelerate that talent drain.

- **[200.220] International collaboration restrictions would isolate American researchers.** Proposed new §200.220 would prohibit the use of any Federal funds - including indirect costs - to support bilateral or multilateral collaborations with "covered foreign countries" or affiliated entities. The proposed rule defines "covered foreign country" by reference to existing designations including "foreign adversaries," "countries of particular concern," and countries subject to national security-related sanctions. While those "covered foreign country" designations are tied to existing Federal lists, the proposed definition of "covered foreign entity" in §200.220(d)(2) is far broader: it reaches any entity owned or controlled by such a country and any entity "affiliated with the military, intelligence, or security services" of one. Because these designation lists can also change during the multi-year life of a research project, the prohibition creates significant uncertainty for legitimate scientific collaborations, including routine partnerships with individual researchers at state-affiliated universities abroad. Legitimate national security restrictions on specific adversarial entities are appropriate and already exist in statute. A prohibition this broad introduces unnecessary uncertainty into the research process and would not protect American interests; it would strand American researchers from the global scientific enterprise while other nations' researchers continue to collaborate freely.
- **Discretionary grant termination (§200.340) would waste taxpayer investment and deter future researchers.** The proposed addition to §200.340(a)(2) would allow agencies to terminate active grants if they determine the award "does not effectuate program goals, Federal agency priorities, or the national interest as they exist at the time of the termination," with no finding of noncompliance or fraud required. Canceling scientifically meritorious research mid-project does not save money, it destroys progress. Years of prior investment, enrolled study participants, trained research staff, and accumulated data all go to waste when a project is cut before completion. Beyond the immediate loss, mid-award termination without cause creates the kind of funding unpredictability that deters talented researchers from entering fields like ME/CFS and Long COVID in the first place. If the United States wants to lead in biomedical science, it must be a reliable funder of serious research. The proposed rule also removes the procedural protections that normally accompany termination. For discretionary terminations, agencies would no longer be required to provide an opportunity to object, a hearing, or an appeal (§§200.340 through 200.342); the agency need only provide written notice with "a brief summary of the reason or reasons" for the action. A companion provision (§200.340(e)) would create a new authority to suspend an award and issue a stop-work order for up to 90 days while the agency contemplates termination. Together, these changes compound the funding unpredictability described above and make multi-year research commitments substantially riskier for institutions and for the patients enrolled in their studies.

II. Several Provisions Add Bureaucratic Burden Without Improving Accountability

The proposed rule states that one of its three objectives is reducing recipient burden. Several provisions would have the opposite effect, creating new layers of federal micromanagement that slow research without improving oversight or accountability.



Solve M.E.

- **[200.432] Requiring express agency pre-approval for every conference.** Proposed new guidance in §200.432 requires that conference attendance be “expressly approved by the Federal agency and included in the terms and conditions of the Federal award” before costs are allowable. Attendance not anticipated at time of award cannot be added without additional agency action. This creates a new administrative process for a routine and modest cost that has never required individual justification. It adds burden to both researchers and agency program officers without any corresponding accountability benefit. If cost control is the objective, a dollar threshold would achieve it far more efficiently than blanket prior approval requirements.
- **[200.454] Memberships, subscriptions, and professional activity costs.** The proposed revision to §200.454 makes the costs of all subscriptions to “business, professional, academic, and technical periodicals” unallowable. Researchers need access to the scientific literature to do their work. This is a necessity for federally funded research, no different from laboratory supplies. Preventing researchers from accessing the literature will slow progress and reduce the quality of the science taxpayers are funding.
- **[200.461] Making publication costs unallowable undermines the public’s return on investment.** The proposed revision to §200.461 makes journal publication costs — including article processing charges and open access fees — unallowable by default, with exceptions only by statute or case-by-case agency approval. When federally funded research cannot be published, the taxpayer investment in that research produces no public benefit. Peer-reviewed publication is how science is validated, disseminated, and built upon. Making it financially prohibitive for researchers to publish their findings suppresses the return on every federal research dollar spent upstream.
- **[200.421] Restricting researcher communications with patients and the public.** The proposed revision to §200.421 makes all advertising and public relations costs unallowable except in narrow circumstances required by statute. For disease communities like ME/CFS, where patients often lack access to informed clinicians and depend on researcher communications to understand their condition and available treatments, this restriction cuts off a direct public benefit of federally funded research. Accountability for federal dollars should mean ensuring research reaches those it is meant to serve, not preventing researchers from communicating with the public.

III. Overbroad Grant Conditions Create Legal Uncertainty

- **[200.450] The “issue advocacy” prohibition is ambiguous and could silence researcher-to-patient communication.** Proposed new paragraph (c)(1)(iv) to §200.450 prohibits Federal funds from being used for “issue advocacy or public messaging that promotes or opposes a particular social, political, or public policy position unrelated to the statutory objectives or performance requirements of the Federal award.” In the absence of a clear definition of “issue advocacy,” researchers communicating findings on politically contested health topics such as post-infectious disease, immune dysfunction, and health disparities, face legal uncertainty about whether their communications comply with award conditions. Researcher communication is essential to patient care and should not be subject to this kind of ambiguity.



IV. Specific Recommendations

- **[200.205]** Preserve the primacy of independent scientific peer review in grant award decisions. If a pre-issuance review process is retained, limit its scope to compliance and legal review. Merit-based peer review is the accountability mechanism that protects taxpayers from politically driven or low-quality grant awards.
- **[200.340]** Remove the expanded discretionary termination authority in §200.340(a)(2), or require a finding of noncompliance, fraud, or substantial programmatic failure. Mid-award termination without cause destroys prior taxpayer investment and destroys research study recruitment pipelines.
- **[200.220]** Narrow §200.220 to specifically identified foreign adversary entities with documented national security risks, consistent with existing statutory frameworks. Do not extend restrictions to broad prohibitions that would introduce uncertainty into the collaborative process, sever legitimate scientific partnerships, and cede ground to competitors.
- **[200.432 and 200.461]** Retain conference attendance and journal publication costs as allowable under standard grant terms. If cost controls are warranted for conferences, establish a dollar threshold. Restore publication costs as allowable, consistent with federal open access obligations and the public's interest in the results of federally funded research.
- **[200.421 and 200.450]** Restore allowability of public outreach costs that serve the scientific objectives of the award. Narrow the "issue advocacy" prohibition in §200.450(c)(1)(iv) to exclude researcher communication of their own federally funded scientific findings.

Conclusion

ME/CFS and Long COVID research has historically received bipartisan support. Senators and Members of Congress from both parties have recognized that these diseases impose a serious burden on American patients, families, and the broader economy, and that federal investment in finding treatments is both a moral obligation and a sound use of public resources.

The proposed guidance would damage the research infrastructure that serves our patient community. It would shift resources away from scientific results and toward administrative compliance, weaken the merit-based systems that protect taxpayers from low-quality or politically driven awards, and cede American biomedical leadership at a moment when our international competitors are accelerating investment.

Solve M.E. urges OMB to withdraw the most harmful provisions of this proposed guidance and to engage with the patient and scientific communities before finalizing changes that would affect the administration of biomedical research grants. We are available to discuss these concerns directly and welcome continued dialogue.

Respectfully submitted,

Solve M.E.