April 16, 2008

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the leadership of the American Society for Pharmacology & Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET), I write to encourage you to support the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) and all the procedural motions necessary to ensure this bill’s success. ASPET is a 4,500 member scientific society whose members conduct basic and clinical pharmacological research within the academic, industrial, and government sectors. Our members discover and develop new medicines and therapeutic agents that fight existing and emerging diseases as well as increasing our knowledge regarding how therapeutics work.

The discipline of Pharmacology also has benefitted greatly from the genomic era, particularly the field of Pharmacogenetics. We already are seeing the clinical application of Pharmacogenetics with screening and consultation for specific therapeutic approaches. Advances in this field are only going to accelerate in the near future.

However, a major obstacle for the translation of Pharmacogenetics to clinical practice is the well-recognized risk for the misuse of genetic information for the purposes of making health insurance and/or employment decisions. The current lack of federal legal protections against the misuse of genetic information has restricted individuals’ access to health information and clinical trials. Fear of the misuse of genetic information limits access to genetic tests. Refusal to utilize effective genetic tests hinders the ability of individuals to learn important medical information, which they could use to proactively manage their health. Fear of discrimination also causes a large number of people to opt out of clinical trials. This lack of participation in research has a negative impact on researchers, clinicians, and industry, slowing the research and development process for targeted drugs and treatments. In order to fully promote personalized medicine and the use of genetic information in healthcare, we must pass GINA.

The Senate passed similar legislation unanimously in the 108th and 109th Congresses. Last year, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed GINA by a 420-3 vote. This legislation has strong bipartisan support and the backing of hundreds of organizations including disease advocates, industry, academia, clinicians, researchers, and community groups.

Sincerely,

Kenneth P. Minneman
President