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April 15, 2026

The Honorable Brian Babin, Chair  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Ranking Member  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rich McCormick, Chair  
Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Emilia Sykes, Ranking Member  
Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Open Access as a Solution to, Not a Cause of, Scientific Publishing Dysfunction**

Dear Chairman Babin, Ranking Member Lofgren, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. My name is Heather Joseph, and I serve as the Executive Director of SPARC. SPARC is a non-profit advocacy organization whose membership includes 190 academic and research libraries at higher education institutions across the U.S.

SPARC's mission is to support systems for research and education that enable everyone, everywhere to access, contribute to, and benefit from sharing knowledge. For more than two decades, we have worked with federal policymakers, academic institutions, researchers, and the public to advance policies that make research outputs openly available and reusable as a public good.

This hearing addresses some of the most consequential questions facing American science today: How can federally funded research be made freely available to the public who paid for it? How do we ensure the integrity of peer review and the scientific record? And how do we design

policies that prioritize the interests of researchers, institutions, and taxpayers?

I appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to these issues and offer this statement to provide SPARC's perspective, grounded in our direct engagement with federal agencies and executive offices and our membership's extensive engagement with these issues.

### **The Core Problem: Misalignment with the Public Interest**

The hearing charter accurately identifies a number of serious problems affecting scientific publishing: the continually rising cost of academic publishing and publications, low-quality journals and paper mills, reproducibility concerns, and the “publish or perish” incentive structures that prioritize volume over rigor. SPARC agrees that these problems are real, consequential, and require careful attention.

We urge the Subcommittee to carefully distinguish between the structural problems in the current publishing marketplace and the policies designed to reform it. Open access, when properly implemented, is not the cause of the dysfunction described in the hearing charter. It is, in large part, a remedy for it.

For decades, scientific publishing has been dominated by a small number of large commercial publishers who have accumulated extraordinary market power. U.S. taxpayers fund the research, researchers produce the work, volunteer reviewers evaluate it for free, and academic and research institutions then pay subscription fees to access the results of that publicly funded work. Increasingly, the same researchers who write the articles reporting on the results of that research are also asked to pay publishers for the privilege of publishing it. This has created a system where profit margins of the largest academic publishers have been reported to exceed those of many technology companies.<sup>1</sup>

This system is central to the misaligned incentives and costs that the hearing charter describes. It primarily rewards prestige and has concentrated publishing revenue in ways that strain institutional library budgets, disadvantage smaller institutions and limit America's ability to lead in cutting edge science. This rentseeking dynamic stems not from open access but from a market where a few players wield outsized power over academic careers, how research is communicated, and to whom. It has resulted in a market in which a handful of journal publishers wield enormous power over academic careers, and American scientific leadership.

### **Strengthening Open Access Policies Will Address the Committee's Concerns**

Open access to federally funded research represents a sound and evidence-based policy direction. The hearing charter raises important concerns about Article Processing Charges (APCs), hybrid journal “double dipping”, and growing evidence that APC-driven models incentivize volume over quality. These are legitimate concerns, but it is important to note that they stem primarily from publisher behavior and are not inherent aspects of Open Access itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Nicholson, *Elsevier Parent Reports 10% Hike in Profits for 2023*, Research Professional News (Feb. 15, 2024), <https://www.researchprofessional.com>. The scientific, technical and medical division of Relx Group, which includes Elsevier, reported an adjusted operating profit margin of 38 percent on revenue of £3.06 billion for 2023.

SPARC urges the Subcommittee to consider the full range of open access models, many of which do not rely on APCs at all. The committee should also consider how agencies could expand exercising their Federal Purpose License and other rights under existing terms and conditions to fulfill their public access mandates at no cost to researchers.

#### *Open Access Enhances Scientific Integrity and Reproducibility*

Contrary to characterizations that link open access with declining quality, research consistently finds that open access to underlying data, code and methodologies strengthens reproducibility.<sup>2</sup> When researchers are required to make their data and methods publicly available, errors can be caught sooner, fraud is harder to sustain and the scientific record is more easily corrected. The hearing charter itself identifies “a lack of transparency, particularly through limited access to underlying data, code, and methodologies” as a key driver of the reproducibility crisis. Open science policies are among the most powerful interventions available to address the problem.

The public access policies currently being implemented by federal agencies<sup>3</sup> are important tools in combating the lack of transparency in science. Congress should affirm and strengthen these policies.

#### *Open Access Can Reduce Wasteful Spending and Improve Federal Research Efficiency*

The federal government invests more than \$90 billion annually in research and development that can be made publicly accessible.<sup>4</sup> When the results of that investment are locked behind subscription paywalls, the costs compound: federal agencies, research laboratories, and universities must repeatedly pay to access findings that their own grant dollars produced. This is a structural inefficiency that well-drafted open access policies can eliminate

The majority of federal funding agencies have implemented public access plans in response to the 2022 OSTP Public Access Memorandum, requiring that peer-reviewed publications arising from federal funding be made immediately and freely available. NIH's public access policy, among the longest-running of any federal agency, provides the most instructive evidence of what these plans can achieve at scale. NIH's PubMed Central database currently provides free public access to more than ten million peer-reviewed articles, with 38 million unique uses per weekday.<sup>5</sup>

For agencies, less well-resourced institutions, clinicians, small businesses, and independent researchers that lack institutional subscriptions, this represents a direct and measurable improvement in access to the findings their tax dollars produced and in the ways they are then able to build on this knowledge.

The Subcommittee should also consider that the current publishing market is characterized by limited competition and significant pricing power concentrated among a small number of large commercial publishers. Much of that revenue flows directly from institutional subscriptions paid

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Krähler, Laura Schächtele, Katrin Auspurg; Code sharing and reproducibility in survey-based social research: evidence from a large-scale audit. *R Soc Open Sci.* 1 March 2026; 13 (3): 251997. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.251997>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/2022-updated-ostp-policy-guidance/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/Final%20Recap%202025.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/about/intro/>

by American universities and federal research libraries. Strengthening open access pathways that do not require author payments, such as through agency repositories, reduces the leverage these publishers hold over publicly funded institutions and introduces competitive pressure that serves taxpayers' interests.

### *Support Models for Open Access that Remove Barriers—Not Maintain Them*

The hearing charter's concerns about APC-driven publishing models are well-founded and deserve careful attention. Any policies designed to respond to the inequities of APC-driven publishing models should be centred on expanding support for open access models that do not rely on APC's of any kind.

Such options include:

- **Diamond Open Access:** journals and platforms that are free to read and free to publish in, supported by institutions, libraries, or scholarly societies rather than by author charges.
- **Open Repositories:** deposit of manuscripts in publicly accessible repositories (such as PubMed Central), without APCs or other publisher fees.
- **Preprint Servers:** non-commercial, community-driven platforms like arXiv, bioRxiv, and medRxiv that allow rapid, free dissemination of research prior to formal peer review, increasing transparency and accelerating scientific communication.
- **Other models,** both established and emerging, that support necessary publication costs without author fees, such as **Subscribe to Open.**

Congress should direct federal funding agencies to evaluate and prioritize non-APC open access pathways in their public access policies, and should explore dedicated funding for the community-owned infrastructure that sustains infrastructure that removes barriers to both readers and authors.

### **Recommendations for Congressional Action**

SPARC respectfully urges the Subcommittee to consider the following policy recommendations:

1. **Affirm and strengthen the OSTP public access guidance.** Congress should codify the 2022 OSTP memorandum's requirement for federally funded research to be immediately, freely, and publicly available and ensure agencies have the resources and guidance necessary to implement it effectively. This is the single most impactful step Congress can take to maximize the return on federal research investment.
2. **Require transparency in publishing costs and practices.** Federal funding agencies should be required to collect and publicly report data on the publishing costs associated with federally funded research, including APCs, subscription expenditures, and institutional licensing agreements.
3. **Invest in public and community-owned publishing infrastructure.** Congress should direct NSF, NIH, and other federal agencies to support the development and sustainability of non-APC, community-governed open access publishing platforms. Targeted grants for diamond open access journals, preprint servers, and open peer review systems would

strengthen competition in the academic publishing market and provide alternatives to commercial options.

4. **Address incentives that are misaligned with reproducibility and the public interest.** Congress should encourage federal funding agencies to examine ways to improve research evaluation frameworks that reward reproducibility, data and code sharing, and open collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges facing scientific publishing are real and consequential. They reflect decades of misaligned incentives, ever-concentrating market power, and insufficient transparency in a system that is fundamental to the advancement of knowledge and the stewardship of public research investments. The Subcommittee is right to examine these issues carefully.

SPARC respectfully urges the Subcommittee to resist characterizations of open access as a source of these problems. Open access—when achieved with appropriate quality standards, transparency requirements, and support for non-APC models—is an important mechanism for increasing the integrity, accessibility, and public value of federally funded science.

SPARC stands ready to work with the Subcommittee, federal agencies, researchers, publishers, and institutions to develop policy frameworks that serve the public interest and strengthen the foundation of American science. We are grateful for this opportunity to contribute to the record and welcome any questions the Subcommittee may have.

Respectfully submitted,

**Heather Joseph**

Executive Director

SPARC