Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Leahy:

Thank you for your leadership in securing an additional $414 million for Alzheimer’s research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in FY 2018. This historic increase is an important investment in research that will provide relief for millions of Americans. I write to urge you to support a $425 million increase for research funding at the NIH on Alzheimer’s disease for FY 2019. These funds will support additional research into developing innovative treatments and diagnostics that can help delay the onset of symptoms and ultimately cure Alzheimer’s. Without a continued substantial investment, our commitment to end Alzheimer’s disease is simply an empty promise.

Alzheimer’s disease is a progressive illness of the brain, which affects an individual’s ability to think and function. The disease progresses from mild impairment to an advanced stage in which the individual loses the ability to communicate, fails to recognize loved ones, becomes bed-bound and totally reliant on someone for all their personal care, ultimately requiring around-the-clock attention. It ends with the brain failing to signal the heart to beat or the lungs to breathe. Caring for individuals with Alzheimer’s is difficult, expensive and heartbreaking. Existing treatments provide at best only modest symptomatic relief over a short duration. We still lack effective disease modifying treatments or prevention techniques.

Age is the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer’s, so the rapidly growing number of older Americans will lead to a corresponding rapid growth in the prevalence of Alzheimer’s disease. The number of people living with Alzheimer’s is projected to grow from more than 5 million today to as many as 16 million in 2050. One in ten Americans over 65 has Alzheimer’s, and the proportion of individuals affected rises with age.

Alzheimer’s also poses an increasingly dire threat to our nation’s fiscal future. According to the findings of an NIH-funded study that was published in the New England Journal of Medicine, Alzheimer’s is the most expensive disease in America. In 2018, the United States will spend an estimated $277 billion caring for individuals with Alzheimer’s and other dementias, with $186 billion of that amount paid by Medicare and Medicaid. This means nearly one out of five Medicare dollars is spent on a person with Alzheimer’s. Unless we move quickly to address this crisis and find disease modifying treatments for those who have it, these costs will grow swiftly in lock step with the numbers of those affected, and Alzheimer’s will increasingly overwhelm our health care system at a cost estimated to exceed $1 trillion in 2050.

We must continue to decisively address this national epidemic. With increasing numbers of Americans affected by this devastating disease and its escalating impact on the federal budget, we simply must allocate resources to overcome this disease. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,