

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

July 1, 2013

The Honorable Amy Gutmann, Ph.D.
Commission Chair
Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Dr. Gutmann:

As I noted in my announcement of the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative on April 2, 2013, developments in neuroscience hold great potential to help individuals and society. New technologies to better visualize the brain and understand how it works promise to speed the discovery of new ways to treat and prevent brain disorders, including those caused by disease and traumatic injury, and to shed light on the neural components of memory and learning, among other benefits.

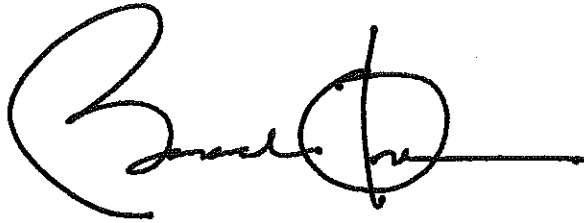
Advances in neuroscience can also raise ethical and legal issues that require reflection and analysis. In keeping with my Administration's strong commitment to rigorous research ethics in all fields, I want to ensure that researchers maintain the highest ethical standards as the field of neuroscience continues to progress. As part of this commitment, we must ensure that neuroscientific investigational methods, technologies, and protocols are consistent with sound ethical principles and practices.

Equally important, we should consider the potential implications of the discoveries that we expect will flow from studies of the brain, and some of the questions that may be raised by those findings and their applications—questions, for example, relating to privacy, personal agency, and moral responsibility for one's actions; questions about stigmatization and discrimination based on neurological measures of intelligence or other traits; and questions about the appropriate use of neuroscience in the criminal-justice system, among others. It will also be important to consider these types of questions as they relate to different life stages, from infancy through old age.

I request that the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues engage with the scientific community and other stakeholders, including the general public, to identify proactively a set of core ethical standards—both to guide neuroscience research and to address some of the ethical dilemmas that may be raised by the application of neuroscience research findings.

In the course of your deliberations, I encourage you to reach out to a wide range of constituencies, including scientists, ethicists, legal scholars, and members of the public, to ensure that your findings and the neuroscience enterprise faithfully reflect and strengthen our values as a Nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Barack Obama". The signature is stylized, with a large, sweeping "B" at the beginning and a circular flourish at the end that encloses the word "Obama".