Opening Statement - Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-IL)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research & Science Education
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Hearing on:

NSF Facilities Management
April 18, 2012

Thank you Chairman Brooks. As I stated at last month's hearing on NSF's MREFC Account, how we prioritize, fund, manage, and oversee major research facilities, and also how we balance facility funding with research grant funding, are all important subjects for oversight by our subcommittee. So I am pleased we are having this series of hearings.

At last month's hearing we had a very interesting discussion about facility planning and construction, including how facility managers calculate and manage contingency budgets and how NSF oversees the whole process. Today's hearing begins where the last one left off.

My understanding is that this hearing is not the result of any specific oversight concern, but rather a broad examination of the status of NSF's policies for and oversight of the management and operations of large facilities. It has been about 10 years since the subcommittee last formally reviewed NSF's facilities policies, and much has changed in the interim; most importantly, I wasn't here on this subcommittee or even in Congress 10 years ago, and neither was the Chairman. I appreciate this effort by the chairman to educate Subcommittee Members on where things stand so that we will be better equipped to anticipate and mitigate any problems in the future.

To that end, the policy topic today that is of particular interest to me is recompetition of management contracts. In 2008 the National Science Board strongly endorsed a recompetition policy for major facility awards. How this is to be implemented across the full spectrum of facility types and management structures remains unresolved. How would recompetition work for the MagLab or CHESS, for example, which physically sit on land owned by the respective universities that manage them? How would recompetition work for any of the facilities with significant international partnership?

I would also like to discuss the process for decommissioning user facilities. That includes how a decision to decommission a facility is made and how decommissioning costs are allocated. Without an agency or Board witness present, I don't think we can get into a full discussion of recompetition or decommissioning policy this morning. But I certainly would be interested to hear this panel's perspectives on these issues so that we can further pursue it with the agency itself.

With that, I look forward to hearing about each of your respective facilities – both the exciting science you are doing and your stewardship of the taxpayer dollars that support these facilities.

I yield back.