

National Aeronautics and Space Administration



Goddard Space Flight Center

Greenbelt, MD, 20771

August 30, 2023

To: Pat Slane, CXC Director
Steve O'Dell, Project Scientist
Helen Cole, Project Manager

Re: Funding levels for the CXC

At the Chandra Users' Committee (CUC) meeting the 28th of November 2022, it was reported that Chandra received the highest achievable marks in the 2022 Senior Review (SR), with the Chandra Panel rating the project 'Excellent' overall and the Astrophysics Advisory Committee (APAC) ranking Chandra 'Tier 1.' The SR22 APAC report recommended that NASA completely fund the request for funds to fully maintain staffing levels - including two additions to the Flight Operations Team to address the increasing difficulty of operating and monitoring the spacecraft - with a reduction in GO (General Observer) funds if necessary.

We have since learned that, while funding for FY23 fully supported these recommendations, the allocations for FY24 and beyond were not sufficient, and if not increased to meet the recommended levels will require either down-sizing the support team or decreasing the GO funds.

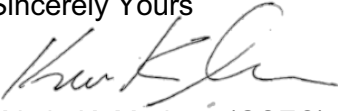
Both possibilities are deeply concerning.

Chandra continues to deliver superb science and remains highly competitive with a steady oversubscription rate of 4.3. This demands a highly efficient observatory. Despite its age, the Chandra X-ray Center has managed to maintain and optimize the observatory operations, so that it can continue delivering groundbreaking science for many more years. With its unprecedented angular resolution, there is a swath of science that only the Chandra observatory can perform, which requires keeping the facility in peak condition. Down-sizing the support risks this invaluable resource.

Equally disturbing is the potential decrease in GO funding, which has remained flat despite inflation and the rising cost on everything from publication fees to conference travel. Many researchers, especially early career scientists, rely on this grant funding, and it is not sustainable for them to subsist and perform the same amount of work on shrinking grants. If the GO funds funding is further reduced to provide the necessary staffing support, researchers will potentially give up on trying to support themselves in this field, which would narrow the user base to a subset of privileged senior scientists from wealthy institutions, and affect the science output, quenching the innovation from early career scientists.

We, the CUC, would like to urge the funding for FY24 and the future to be increased to maintain the current support and keep the GO funding levels.

Sincerely Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristin K. Madsen', written in a cursive style.

Kristin K. Madsen (GSFC) on behalf of the CUC

Marcella Brusa (University of Bologna)

Chris Fryer (LANL)

Anjali Gupta (Columbus State Community College)

Tesla Jeltema (UC Santa Cruz)

Silas Laycock (UMass Lowell)

Dave Pooley (Trinity University)

Takanori Sakamoto (Aoyama Gakuin University)

Tea Temin (Princeton University)

Brian Williams (GSFC)