MRF Melanoma Research Foundation



The Advocate Newsletter – April 2026

Chair's Welcome

From the desk of Douglas Brodman, Board Chair:

Each year, Advocacy Days reminds us of the progress being made and the power of a strong melanoma community. After the success of one of our largest Advocacy Days to date, we head into this appropriations season having made a strong case for investments in melanoma research and prevention. Our advocates have also mobilized rapidly to defeat anti-mRNA state legislation that would impact patients' ability to receive promising cancer therapeutics in both Tennessee and South Carolina, further stressing the importance of protecting access to innovative treatments. Lastly, despite setbacks from federal regulators regarding new drug approvals for melanoma and restricting children's access to indoor tanning devices, we see a glimmer of hope in their proposed approval of new sunscreen filters that expand options in skin cancer prevention.

Sincerely,

Douglas Brodman

Chair, Board of Directors

2026 Advocacy Days Recap



The MRF held its 16th Annual Advocacy Days in Washington, DC and brought together over 70 advocates – representing 22 different states across the country – to advance key federal policy priorities of the melanoma community. This year, patients, caregivers, researchers, clinicians and loved ones heard from policy experts representing Holland & Knight lobbying firm, the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), Johns Hopkins University, the Alliance for mRNA Medicines and Akin Gump.

Our advocates met with 47 congressional offices to champion:

- $40 million for the Department of Defense's (DoD) Melanoma Research Program (MRP) within the CDMRP
- Robust funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Cancer Institute (NCI) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support melanoma research and prevention activities
- Committee report language reiterating congressional intent on the implementation of the SAFE Sunscreen Standards Act.

Our Advocacy Days were made even more special with the participation of over 7 members of the medical research community. We were honored to host recent MRF-funded research grant awardees as their expertise further amplified our collective voice and drive the urgency of these critical issues.

Thank you to all the advocates who travelled from every corner to share stories and shape policy change to ultimately advance melanoma research, prevention and treatment. Together, we are working toward a future where a cure is possible.

To view images from this year's Advocacy Days program, click here and to hear a few heartfelt testimonials about our advocates' purpose, view this YouTube playlist.

MRF Hosts Congressional Briefing on Melanoma Research Program (MRP)



On February 11, the MRF hosted its first congressional briefing on the CDMRP's Melanoma Research Program. The briefing brought together leading melanoma researchers involved with the MRP, consumer reviewers who have participated in the grant review process, and veterans with melanoma to share why this vital research program is so important to the warfighter community. Staff representing over 18 congressional offices attended the briefing, learning about the program and melanoma at a critical time when lawmakers put forth federal budget proposals for the upcoming fiscal year.

FDA Withdraws Proposed Rule on Sunlamp Regulation

In 2015, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a proposed rule stating that sunlamp products, such as indoor tanning beds, are not to be used by people under age 18. This action also proposed a requirement that adults choosing to use tanning facilities had to provide written risk acknowledgement every six months.

On March 16, the FDA withdrew these recommendations, ensuring that these protections – including the tanning bed ban for minors and other risk acknowledgement requirements – will not be enacted at the federal level.

The MRF recognizes that these changes are harmful to the American people, as lowering age restrictions and removing barriers to access makes damaging tanning beds more available. In response, the MRF led a sign on letter to the FDA expressing disappointment in their decision to retract the proposed rule and encouraged them to reconsider the best means for addressing the issues covered by the proposed rule and related issues regarding access to sunlamp products.

Anti-mRNA Legislation Ramping Up

Tennessee

In March, two bills targeting mRNA were scheduled for committee hearings in the Tennessee General Assembly and Senate. House Bill 1852 and Senate Bill 1767 looked to ban mRNA statewide without exemptions for cancer treatments, rare disease, clinical trials or any other lifesaving FDA-approved therapeutics. In response, the MRF provided patient testimony to both Tennessee House and Senate committees to successfully defeat both bills and help maintain access to as many treatment options as possible for patients.

The MRF is closely tracking any further developments and will continue to work with the stakeholder community to prevent the passage of anti-mRNA legislation in Tennessee.

South Carolina

In late January, the South Carolina House Medical and Health Affairs Subcommittee held a hearing on a concerning piece of anti-mRNA legislation. Introduced by State Rep. Josiah Magnuson (R-38), House Bill 4262 sought to ban the use of mRNA-based therapies by healthcare professionals and establish penalties for any utilization. In strong opposition, the MRF's Director of Public Policy and Advocacy testified at the committee hearing to share the impact a mRNA ban would have on patient access – especially being a promising treatment option for patients with advanced melanoma. Additionally, the MRF submitted written testimony and a body of evidence in support of mRNA as an emerging cancer therapeutic and the promising results it's yielding for the community. Through combined efforts, the bill was successfully stalled and did not advance out of committee.

The MRF will continue to monitor any further legislative activity on H. 4262 and will participate in any future efforts to block similar bills from being introduced in the state of South Carolina.

FDA Does Not Approve RP1



On behalf of the melanoma community, the MRF was disappointed to learn of the FDA's decision to decline approval of RP1 in combination with nivolumab for patients with anti-PD1 refractory metastatic melanoma who do not find success with other treatments'. Sadly, the FDA's decision also impacts Replimune's ability to offer RP1 in a compassionate use setting.

We thank the countless patients, caregivers and advocates who submitted their personal stories to help urge the FDA to approve this treatment. In September of 2025, the MRF had also signed onto a letter alongside other peer organizations that urged the FDA to approve RP1, while addressing any regulatory concerns of the trial.

The MRF continues to support ongoing research efforts to improve outcomes among metastatic melanoma patients. With 50% of these patients not responding to immunotherapy, we must continue to push for additional treatment options and clinical trials for advanced disease.

MRF Provides Remarks to FDA on Bemotrizinol Approval

In January, the MRF provided remarks to the FDA regarding the FDA's proposal to amend the Over-the-Counter (OTC) Monograph M020: Sunscreen Drug Product for Over-the-Counter Human Use. The proposed amendment would approve a new filter, bemotrizinol, for use in sunscreen.

The MRF has been actively involved in the issue of sunscreen filter approval for several years as our stance has long been that sunscreen is an important skin cancer prevention tool, and the best sunscreen is the one a person will wear daily. We have advocated for alignment with international safety standards for new filter applications, providing previous comments to the FDA's Over-the-Counter Monograph User Fee Program Reauthorization in November 2024, participating in a congressional briefing on the issue of sunscreen filter approvals and their importance to public health in December 2023, and testifying before Congress in favor of the SAFE Sunscreen Standards Act in April 2025.

The addition of bemotrizinol to the list of approved sunscreen filters available in the United States is important progress and a step in the right direction by the FDA. Should this proposed order be finalized, Americans will have more options to protect themselves and their families from skin cancer. We hope that in this new era following the incorporation of the SAFE Sunscreen Act into the Over-the-Counter Monograph User Fee Act (OMUFA) Reauthorization passed by Congress, several new sunscreen filters will become available in the near future.



1420 K Street NW, 7th Floor Washington, DC 20005 | Tel: (202) 347-9675
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