Dear Associate Administrator Steve Shih,

The plasma physics community is disturbed and saddened by NASA leadership’s recent termination of the test project at Goddard Space Flight Center that allowed employees to display their pronouns in official agency identifiers, as well as reports that this policy change was communicated in a manner that disrespected employees’ identities. Public statements from NASA in response have done little to address the concerns of the LGBT+ community and fail to commit to restoring this option and making it available to all NASA employees.

As members of a professional society spanning a wide range of career statuses from students to scientists and faculty, we want to emphasize that voluntary (or opt-in) usage of personal pronouns in display names, screen names, and other forms of ID is a professional practice that is widely used at many institutions, both public and private, and a low-cost tool for affirming the gender identities of employees.

We are deeply concerned by individual accounts that employees were told by leadership that their pronouns were removed because they made others uncomfortable. An environment that discourages employees from disclosing their gender identities can lead to misgendering and other harmful outcomes for marginalized individuals. Shaming vulnerable employees for displaying their pronouns in this manner is unprofessional and unacceptable.

We urge NASA to choose a standard of practice that gives employees the flexibility to use and display their preferred pronouns at their own discretion. We note with interest that NASA has described this policy as successful, and we are dismayed that this successful policy was terminated with no notice, and that NASA has failed to provide an equivalent service. This is a significant step backwards on NASA’s journey toward creating a diverse and equitable workforce.

Signed,
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on behalf of the APS DPP Pride Committee

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