

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

GLEN H. STURTEVANT, JR.

10TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
ALL OF POWHATAN COUNTY; PART OF
CHESTERFIELD COUNTY; AND PART OF THE
CITY OF RICHMOND
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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
COMMERCE AND LABOR
COURTS OF JUSTICE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS

October 3, 2017

Governor Terry McAuliffe
Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor McAuliffe:

We write to express our concern and opposition to the Commonwealth's role in funding abusive and wasteful dog experimentation at the McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Richmond. Our colleague in Congress, Representative Dave Brat recently received a unanimous vote in the House of Representatives to defund all painful dog experiments at the VA.ⁱ In addition to state and federal lawmakers, the Richmond SPCA has also voiced its strong opposition to these experiments and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* has endorsed Congressman Brat's legislation to defund the projects.^{ii,iii} However, we are troubled to learn from your website that Virginians may be supporting this abuse with their state tax dollars.

Recently, an Iraq war veteran who works at the McGuire VA came forward with disturbing information about the facility's mistreatment of dogs and misuse of resources.^{iv} One photograph showed a dog with extensive lacerations, a victim of invasive experiments that often involve inducing painful heart attacks.

These problems are not isolated. A VA Office of Research Oversight investigation found widespread oversight failures in the McGuire VA dog testing facility that included mistreating dogs, failing to accurately report dog use, and approving painful dog experiments without justification.^v

Unfortunately, all of these problems follow documented McGuire VA violations from 2015 and 2016^{vi} involving repeated botched surgeries that killed dogs as well as related "reckless behavior" of a staffer whose "actions threaten the integrity of [the] institution."^{vii}

We were alarmed to find that this noncompliant dog research received state taxpayer funding from the Commonwealth during the time of the documented abuses. A press release published on Governor.Virginia.Gov indicates that a project using dog testing at the McGuire VA was awarded a \$99,970 grant from the Commonwealth in 2016.^{viii}

We also understand that the project was funded by a \$50,000 Virginia Commonwealth University grant from July 2015 to July 2016. Both grants cover a period during which numerous violations were documented. New documents released through the Freedom of Information Act also show that a current McGuire dog testing project approved on December 12, 2016 cites its funding source as the

“Commonwealth of Virginia.” The one-year project involves painful and deadly heart experiments on 20 dogs.^{ix}

We are interested in learning more about the Commonwealth’s involvement in these controversial experiments and how these documented abuses are being addressed. Please provide answers to the following questions:

- In total, how much taxpayer money has been provided to projects involving dog experimentation at the McGuire VA? Through what funding streams was this money provided and when?
- Is the Commonwealth currently funding any projects at the McGuire VA or elsewhere involving experiments on dogs?
- Was the Commonwealth formally notified that violations had taken place on these taxpayer-funded projects?
- What action, if any, has the Commonwealth taken to address these violations and recoup any misspent taxpayer funds?
- Do the conditions of the grant received for this research require that relevant laws and policies governing the research activity be adhered to?
- What protocols are in place requiring recipients of Commonwealth funds to report any research noncompliance to the Governor, General Assembly, or the public?

We hope that this begins a meaningful discussion about the Commonwealth’s funding of painful and unnecessary research on dogs at the McGuire VA. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Sen. Glen H. Sturtevant, Jr.



Sen. William M. Stanley, Jr.

ⁱ O'Brien, Kerri. "House unanimously passes amendment to defund VA dog experiments." *WRIC*. 27 July 2017. <<http://wric.com/2017/07/26/house-unanimously-passes-amendment-to-defund-va-dog-experiments/>>.

ⁱⁱ O'Brien, Kerri. "State lawmaker, Richmond SPCA join calls to end dog experiments at McGuire VA." *WRIC*. 30 June 2017. <<http://wric.com/2017/06/30/state-lawmaker-richmond-sPCA-join-calls-to-end-dog-experiments-at-mcguire-va/>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Editorial: Kudos to Dave Brat for his bill on dog research." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. 24 July 2017. <http://www.richmond.com/opinion/our-opinion/editorial-kudos-to-dave-brat-for-his-bill-on-dog/article_b7252d30-a14a-5275-8f11-1347aa7c1961.html>.

^{iv} O'Brien, Kerri. "Whistleblower gives inside knowledge of dog experiments at McGuire VA Medical Center." *WRIC*. 24 July 2017. <<http://wric.com/2017/07/24/whistleblower-gives-inside-knowledge-of-dog-experiments-at-mcguire-va-medical-center/>>.

^v Bennett, Jonah. "EXCLUSIVE: VA Oversight Office Finds Evidence Of Abuse And Oversight Failures In Dog Experimentation Program." *The Daily Caller*. 26 June 2017. <<http://dailycaller.com/2017/06/26/exclusive-va-oversight-office-finds-evidence-of-abuse-and-oversight-failures-in-dog-experimentation-program/>>.

^{vi} Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center. Office Finds Evidence Of Abuse And Oversight Failu

^{vii} O'Brien, Kerri. "Dogs ' 'Dogs Dogs i. "Dogs o' killed during medical testing at McGuire Veteran's Hospital." *WRIC*. 29 March 2017. <<http://www.wric.com/2017/03/29/dogs-killed-during-medical-testing-at-mcguire-veterans-hospital/>>.

^{viii} "Governor McAuliffe Announces 2016 Research Commercialization Awards." *Governor Terry McAuliffe's Newsroom*. 10 June 2016. <<https://governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/newsarticle?articleId=15591>>.

^{ix} McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Animal Component of Research Protocol no. 02235. Approved on 12 Dec 2016.