



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON**

September 27, 2018

The Honorable Dina Titus  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Titus:

Thank you for your June 28, 2018, and August 8, 2018, co-signed letters to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding VA's animal research program. VA is committed to transparency and will continue to provide updated information on research with dogs as it becomes available.

VA has complied with all the requirements in Section 254 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-141), which was signed on March 23, 2018. Section 254 has multiple requirements for utilizing Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 funds for VA canine research, including approval by the Secretary. No new dog studies have completed the approval process defined by Section 254 yet, but one new canine study is in the review process and others are anticipated. Nine studies ongoing at the time of Bill passage were re-reviewed by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Chief Veterinary Medical Officer, and Chief Research and Development Officer, and were approved for continuation by then-Secretary David Shulkin on March 28, 2018. Accordingly, any purchases to support those ongoing studies with FY 2018 funds are fully compliant with the requirements of Section 254. The purchases made by the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center described in your August 8, 2018, letter are in support of one of those nine studies, which include critical research to investigate how to restore the ability of Veterans with traumatic spinal cord injuries to breathe properly and avoid repeated bouts of pneumonia and early death.

Please see the enclosed detailed responses with information to address the specific questions posed in both your letters. Similar questions from the June 28, 2018, and August 8, 2018, letters have been integrated and answered together for clarity. The responses include a link to, and a hard copy of, VA's adoption guidance, which has been broadened to include not only dogs but animals of any species covered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Welfare Act Regulations. The latest version of this adoption guidance was released in July 2018 and formalizes practices that have long been standard within VA.

In support of our efforts to find the best possible loving homes for adopted research animals, I am pleased to report that as of August 16, 2018, VA signed an agreement with the non-profit organization Homes for Animal Heroes to facilitate placements.

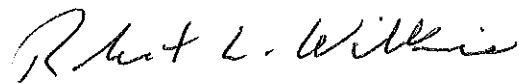
Page 2.

The Honorable Dina Titus

Should you have further questions, please have a member of your staff contact Mr. Jeremy Wheeler, Congressional Relations Officer, at (202) 224-2815 or [Jeremy.Wheeler@va.gov](mailto:Jeremy.Wheeler@va.gov). A similar response has been sent to Congressman Brat.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert L. Wilkie".

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosure

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Response to Congresswoman Titus and  
Congressman Brat  
Regarding VA's Animal Research Program**

**Question 1. A list of all dog experimentation projects that have been approved by the Secretary and the Chief of Research and Development since July 2017, making particular note of any projects that have been approved since the law requiring their sign-off was enacted in March. Please include project titles, approval dates, approved budget, VA location, and USDA pain category.**

**VA Response:** Since July 2017, no new VA canine studies have been initiated. One new proposed canine study is working its way through the approval process formalized in VA Guidance Document AR2017-001, revision 1, "Canine, Feline, and Non-Human Primate Research Protocols," dated May 15, 2018, but it has not yet reached my desk for review.

Of 13 canine studies ongoing in July 2017, 9 are currently active. Table 1 below lists these active studies, with the information requested in your letters. In accordance with Section 254 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-141), these nine ongoing studies were evaluated and then approved for continuation by the Chief Research and Development Officer on March 28, 2018, and by then-Secretary Shulkin on March 29, 2018, making them eligible for use of Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 funds. Some of the studies have not yet begun, although the research with dogs was approved.

**Question 2. The amount of taxpayer money spent on dog experimentation since the omnibus was signed into law in March.**

**VA Response:** Table 2 summarizes data provided in Table 1. Table 2 provides approved total budgets for each project in FY 2018, the amounts budgeted for FY 2018 specifically for dog research, and the actual funds spent since March 23, 2018 (passage of the omnibus bill). A total of \$27,571 of Federal funds were spent (VA and National Institutes of Health (NIH)), and a total of \$7,105 of non-Federal funds (University and non-profit) for dog research since March 23, 2018. The Cleveland VA program awarded a contract to Marshall Farms and obligated \$42,721.50 for dogs through FY 2019, but only \$11,715 has been spent to date.

**Question 3. For projects that were discontinued, what is the fate of the dogs no longer needed for the research? Provide specifics on each project and the disposition of the dogs.**

**VA Response:** Table 3 below lists the four projects discontinued since July 2017. Since July 2017, there have been three research protocols involving dogs that have been discontinued and one is currently on hold pending further review. Another project currently active is expected to be discontinued shortly and will be added as the fifth

entry in Table 3 (please see Project #2 in Table 1). In all cases, the dogs that were eligible for adoption were placed with adoptive families.

**Question 4. The VA previously informed us that a new policy regarding the adoption of dogs no longer needed for research would be released in final form in mid-April. Was this document released? If so, can you please provide a copy? If not, when will it be available?**

**VA Response:** The release of the adoption document was delayed when VA decided to proactively broaden the scope from research dogs to all research species covered by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Welfare Act Regulations, formalizing the practices that have long been standard within VA. The language was reviewed by USDA and finalized after consultation with experts in the General Services Administration. The document has been distributed to all VA stations and is posted online as document AR2018-001 at: [https://www.research.va.gov/programs/animal\\_research/guidance.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/programs/animal_research/guidance.cfm). A copy is included with this enclosure.

To help facilitate adoptions of research animals, VA is pleased to report that we recently signed an agreement with the non-profit organization Homes for Animal Heroes to assist us in facilitating adoption placements to loving homes.

Table 1. List of Ongoing, Previously Approved VA Dog Protocols

Protocol Title	Location	Funding Source	Total Approved Budget for FY 2018	Budget for Research with Dogs	Funds spent on research with dogs since 3/23/18	Dates of initial Institutional Animal Care and Use (IACUC) approval, most recent IACUC approval, and Chief Research and Development Officer and Secretary approvals	USDA Pain Category approved, and actual	Comments
1 High Frequency Spinal Cord Stimulation to Restore Cough	Cleveland, OH	Federal-VA	\$105,893	\$57,209	\$11,715	4/1/14; 3/15/18; 3/28/18; 3/29/18	D; D	A contract worth \$42,721.50 was awarded to Marshall Farms for dogs through FY 2019; \$11,715 has been billed to date.
	Purpose of Research	Veterans with spinal cord injuries that impair their ability to cough are vulnerable to potentially fatal respiratory infections. This study evaluates how electrical stimulation of the spinal cord could be optimized to activate respiratory muscles appropriately to generate effective coughing.						

Enclosure

2	<p>Potentiation of Immunotherapy with Targeted Nanoporphyryn in Bladder Cancer</p>	<p>Pleasant Hill, CA</p>	<p>Federal-VA</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>5/4/17; 4/19/18; 3/28/18; 3/29/18</p>	<p>Clinical trial in dogs was approved and had not yet begun. This component of the study has now been replaced because an opportunity came up to pursue a different aspect of the work needed. Will move to Table 3 of discontinued protocols in coming months.</p>	
<p>Purpose of Research</p> <p>Development of a new treatment for bladder cancer that is not adequately controlled by existing treatments.</p>									
3	<p>Contribution of Inflammation and Oxidative Stress in Pericardial Fluid to Postoperative Atrial Fibrillation after Cardiac Surgery</p>	<p>St. Louis, MO</p>	<p>Federal-VA</p>	<p>\$147,528</p>	<p>\$9,000</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>11/30/16; 11/17/17; 3/28/18; 3/29/18</p>	<p>D; none used as of 8/14/18</p>	<p>Research with dogs has not yet begun.</p>

Enclosure

		Purpose of Research	Postoperative atrial fibrillation is associated with longer hospital stays after cardiac surgery, and increased risks of stroke and death. This is research into the mechanisms involved in atrial fibrillation, which we need to understand to find treatments for postoperative atrial fibrillation.						
4	Neuropharmacology of Pontine Control of Breathing Frequency	Milwaukee, WI	Federal-VA	\$150,000	\$26,490	\$2,288	6/10/15; 9/7/17; 3/28/18; 3/29/18	D; D	
		Purpose of Research	Veterans with certain head or neck injuries, or who suffer from pain that can only be controlled with potent analgesics, often experience impaired control of breathing and coughing. This work is to increase understanding of that control, which is fundamental to developing better ways to help these Veterans.						
5	Mechanistic Insight of Premature Ventricular Contractions-induced Cardiomyopathy	Richmond, VA	Federal-NIH	\$114,076	\$47,000	\$13,568	8/29/16; 6/1/18; 3/28/18; 3/29/18	D and E; D	NIH budget year for this award is actually 5/15/18-4/30/19.
		Purpose of Research	Premature Ventricular Contractions (PVC) interfere with proper beating of the heart and can lead to chronic heart disease. This is research into the cellular mechanisms involved, which we need to understand in order to develop better ways to manage PVCs.						
6	Autonomic Nerve Activity and Cardiac Arrhythmias	Richmond, VA	Private Non-profit Research Foundation	\$76,832	\$23,417	\$0	12/16/13; 9/6/17; 3/28/18; 3/29/18	D; D	

Enclosure

	Purpose of Research	Premature ventricular contractions interfere with nerve signals to the heart and can damage heart muscle. This is research into how the loss of nerve signals might be responsible for the damage, which we need to understand to develop better ways to protect the heart.											
7	Effect of Chronic Premature Ventricular Contractions on the Remodeled Ischemic Heart	Richmond, VA	Private Non-profit Research Foundation	No specific amount	No specific amount	\$1,520	9/9/16; 6/1/18; 3/28/18; 3/29/18	E; E	Sub-project covered by the budget for study 5, above				
	Purpose of Research	Heart attacks injure heart muscle and make it more prone to PVCs, which can cause further damage. This is research into how the injury produced by a heart attack interacts with PVCs to impact heart function, which we need to understand in order to improve heart function after heart attacks.											
8	Nanoparticle Injection into Ganglionated Neural Plexi to Prevent Atrial Fibrillation	Richmond, VA	University	\$119,970	\$38,000	\$5,585	8/10/16; 6/1/18; 3/28/18; 3/29/18	D; D					
	Purpose of Research	Atrial fibrillation (AF) increases the risk of stroke, heart failure, hospitalization, and death, but current treatments for AF are risky. This is research into new ways to treat AF with less risk than is currently possible.											
9	A Comparison of Canine Anesthetic Regimens to Optimize Hemodynamic Stability and Electrophysiologic and	Richmond, VA	Federal- VA	No specific amount	No specific amount	\$0	8/3/17; 6/1/18; 3/28/18; 3/29/18	C; C	Research involves observations in dogs on other protocols. Budget covered by project 5 above.				



Enclosure

Neurophysiologic Data Acquisition								
	Purpose of Research	Sedatives and anesthetics commonly affect how the heart works. This study is designed to sort out how to improve anesthesia for future studies of cardiac function.						

**Table 2. Summary of Funds Spent on Research with Dogs since March 23, 2018 (Summary of Data in Table 1)**

<b>Source of Funds</b>	<b>Total research budget approved for FY 2018</b>	<b>Amount in FY 2018 budget for dog studies</b>	<b>Amount spent on dog studies since March 23, 2018</b>
Federal- VA and NIH	\$517,497	\$139,699	\$27,571
University and Private Non-Profit Research Foundations	\$196,802	\$61,402	\$7,105

Table 3. List of VA Protocols for Research with Dogs Discontinued or on Hold Since July 2017

Protocol Title	Funding Source	Purpose of Research	VA Location	Status	Disposition of Remaining Dogs
What Causes Human Narcolepsy?	Federal-VA	To understand and develop improved therapeutics for narcolepsy.	Los Angeles	October 2017: Principal Investigator (PI) determined that scientific goals of the current study can be met with mice; protocol for research with dogs closed.	Although approved, no work had been done yet on this protocol.
Control of Blood Glucose Levels in Diabetes	Private Industry Sponsor	Collaborative work to develop new devices for monitoring blood glucose and refining insulin dosing to better control blood glucose and reduce complications of diabetes.	Los Angeles	June 2018: Collaborative work was completed; further studies will be conducted by the other party alone; VA protocol closed.	All dogs were either adopted out or transferred to the party that had previously collaborated with VA.
The Investigation of Novel Imaging Approaches to the Circle of Willis	University	To evaluate the use of an ultra-thin camera for direct viewing of the inside and outside of brain blood vessels, which could increase the accuracy and safety of procedures to treat aneurysms, deploy stents to hold blood vessels open, and remove clots that cause strokes.	Milwaukee	March 2018: protocol on hold pending further review by VA Office of Research and Development.	No dogs were on hand when the project was placed on hold, so none were available for adoption.

Enclosure

<p>Determining Organ Perfusion During Vascular Compromise</p>	<p>University</p>	<p>To evaluate the accuracy and precision of Near Infrared Spectroscopy for measuring blood flow to internal organs, which is crucial to monitor during and after transplantation.</p>	<p>Milwaukee</p>	<p>March 2018; New information suggests that pigs are now more suitable for accomplishing research goals, so the PI terminated this protocol.</p>	<p>No dogs were on hand when the decision was made to switch to a porcine model, so no dogs were available for adoption.</p>
---	-------------------	--	------------------	---	--