



*Taxpayers shouldn't be forced to pay \$20 billion+ for **wasteful** government animal experiments.*

March 15, 2021

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Director, Division of Program Integrity  
National Institutes of Health  
Office of Management Assessment  
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Via email: [Deborah.Kearse@nih.gov](mailto:Deborah.Kearse@nih.gov)

Dear Ms. Kearse,

On behalf of White Coat Waste Project (WCW) and its more than 3 million members and supporters, I am writing to request an investigation into widespread violations of federal spending transparency law by EcoHealth Alliance (EHA) related to its dangerous National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded coronavirus animal experiments conducted in cooperation with the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).

**EcoHealth funneled NIH funding to the Wuhan Institute of Virology for dangerous coronavirus experiments on animals at center of COVID-19 origin probes**

Since 2002, EHA has received nearly \$15 million in NIH funding.<sup>1</sup> Over the past year, major media outlets,<sup>2,3</sup> Congress<sup>4,5</sup> and the Biden<sup>6</sup> and Trump Administrations<sup>7</sup> have expressed concerns that WIV's coronavirus animal experiments that EHA participated in and funded with NIH money—including “gain-of-function” animal experiments designed to make coronaviruses deadlier and more contagious to humans—could have caused the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

**Violations of federal spending transparency law by EcoHealth Alliance**

EHA has been criticized for obscuring its questionable relationship with WIV and the Chinese government.<sup>9,10,11</sup> We have determined that EHA has also failed to publicly disclose taxpayer-funding for its work with WIV, in violation of federal law.

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<sup>1</sup> [NIH RePORTER: EcoHealth Alliance funding history.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [We're still missing the origin story of this pandemic. China is sitting on the answers.](#) Washington Post, 2/5/2021

<sup>3</sup> [Wuhan lab at heart of COVID outbreak may get three more years of US funding.](#) New York Post, 2/21/2021

<sup>4</sup> [Reschenthaler introduces bill to defund EcoHealth Alliance.](#) Press release, 2/1/2021

<sup>5</sup> [28 Congressmembers demand probe into NIH-Funded Wuhan animal lab that may have caused pandemic, following WCW exposé.](#) WCW Blog, 2/23/2021

<sup>6</sup> [U.S. still hasn't ruled out lab accident origin for Covid because China hasn't been transparent.](#) NBC News, 2/16/2021

<sup>7</sup> [NIH presses U.S. nonprofit for information on Wuhan virology lab.](#) The Wall Street Journal, 8/19/2020

<sup>8</sup> [The lab-leak hypothesis.](#) New York Magazine, 1/4/2021

<sup>9</sup> [Who are the Covid investigators?](#) The Wall Street Journal Editorial Board, 2/15/2021

<sup>10</sup> [The man at the center of the world's biggest story has a conflict of interest. why won't the media report it?](#) The Daily Caller, 2/13/2021

<sup>11</sup> [A conflict of interest: How can Peter Daszak, a British scientist who helped fund controversial experiments on coronaviruses by China's Batwoman, be part of WHO's team investigating the original source of the outbreak?](#) Daily Mail, 1/9/2021

As you are aware, long-standing federal spending transparency law—known as the Stevens Amendment—requires that any press releases or statements describing taxpayer-funded projects under the Departments of Education, Labor and Health and Human Services (HHS) must include, “ (1) the percentage of the total costs of the program or project which will be financed with Federal money; (2) the dollar amount of Federal funds for the project or program; and (3) percentage and dollar amount of the total costs of the project or program that will be financed by non-governmental sources.”<sup>12</sup>

**Virtually all of EHA’s press releases reporting its taxpayer-funded experiments over the last three years violate the Stevens Amendment.<sup>13</sup> The releases fail to acknowledge federal funding, and/or fail to report the amount of taxpayer money spent, and/or fail to report the percentage of the project paid for with taxpayer funds.**

**The noncompliant press releases cover EHA’s coronavirus experiments with WIV including:**

1. EcoHealth Alliance Announces Discovery of SARS-Like Viruses Spilling Over into People in China<sup>14</sup>
2. EcoHealth Alliance Announces Discovery of New Bat-Origin Virus Impacting Pig Farms in Southern China<sup>15</sup>
3. Phylogenetic Analysis Shows Novel Wuhan Coronavirus Clusters with SARS<sup>16</sup>

### **Systemic spending transparency failures by NIH grantees**

The current example is troubling, but it is a symptom of a broader problem. A report coauthored by WCW found widespread violations of the Stevens Amendment by NIH grant-receiving institutions performing wasteful animal experiments.<sup>17</sup>

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) audit that followed the release of WCW’s report—after being requested by current Senators Ron Johnson (R-WI), James Lankford (R-OK), Rand Paul (R-KY) and Joni Ernst (R-IA)—cited our troublesome findings and wrote that, “NIH officials stated that they do not specifically monitor for Stevens Amendment compliance.”<sup>18,19</sup>

The GAO recommended that HHS (including NIH) begin enforcing the law, and HHS stated that it “would direct all operating divisions to design a process for implementing and monitoring the Stevens Amendment and would update HHS grants policy to reflect this new process” and that it “would address any non-compliance issues if they were raised.”

Unfortunately, it appears NIH and its grantees continue to violate the law with impunity despite it being included in the NIH Grants Policy Statement under the heading “Acknowledgment of Federal Funding” and the NIH issuing notices specifically reminding grantees of this transparency mandate.<sup>20,21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sec 505 of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Bill, 2021 (H. Rept. 116-450)

<sup>13</sup> [EcoHealth Alliance press releases.](#)

<sup>14</sup> [EcoHealth Alliance announces discovery of SARS-Like viruses spilling over into people in China](#) EHA press releases, 3/2/2018

<sup>15</sup> [EcoHealth Alliance announces discovery of new bat-origin virus impacting pig farms in Southern China](#) EHA press releases, 4/8/2018

<sup>16</sup> [Phylogenetic analysis shows novel Wuhan coronavirus clusters with SARS](#) EHA press releases, 1/2020

<sup>17</sup> [New report: Ivy League flunks on animal testing transparency.](#) WCW Blog, 4/25/2017

<sup>18</sup> [Feds confirm WCW report on animal testing transparency violations, propose reforms.](#) WCW Blog, 3/14/2019

<sup>19</sup> [Agency action required to ensure grantees identify federal contribution amounts.](#) Government Accountability Office, 3/14/2019

<sup>20</sup> [NIH grants policy statement \(Sec. 4.2.1\). Acknowledgement of federal funding.](#)

<sup>21</sup> [NIH: Notice of legislative mandates in effect for FY 2021.](#) 1/29/2021

To stem this rampant noncompliance and improve transparency about federal spending, Iowa Senator Joni Ernst introduced the Cost Openness and Spending Transparency (COST) Act (S. 807 in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress) to require that all recipients of federal funds abide by the conditions of the Stevens Amendment and giving the Office of Management and Budget the authority to withhold funding for noncompliance.<sup>22</sup>

A version of the Stevens Amendment was also passed as part of the National Defense Authorization Act and now covers Defense Department grantees, including EcoHealth Alliance.<sup>23</sup>

### **Request for action**

For 30 years since the Stevens Amendment was first passed, recipients of NIH funding have been legally required to clearly disclose the cost of their projects so taxpayers are aware of how their hard-earned money is being spent. Yet, evidence shows ongoing, widespread violations of this common-sense spending transparency law. The NIH has acknowledged this problem and pledged to address it.

We urge you to investigate the federal transparency violations documented in this letter and hold EHA accountable for its repeated failure to properly disclose taxpayer funding for dangerous coronavirus experiments conducted in conjunction with WIV. We also request that the NIH permanently disqualify EHA from receiving taxpayer funding.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at [DL@whitecoatwaste.org](mailto:DL@whitecoatwaste.org) or 202-643-8453.

Sincerely,



Daniel Lopez  
Research Manager  
White Coat Waste Project

cc: Meredith Stein, Acting Director, OMA  
Jeff Hayden, Assistant Director, OMA  
Dr. Michael Lauer, Deputy Director, NIH Office of Extramural Research  
Senator Joni Ernst

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<sup>22</sup> [Cost Openness and Spending Transparency \(COST\) Act \(S. 807\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Victory! Defense bill requires rogue DOD-funded animal experimenters to disclose spending](#). WCW blog, 12/14/2020