



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

June 3, 2022

Deborah Kearse  
Director, Division of Program Integrity  
National Institutes of Health  
Office of Management Assessment  
6011 Executive Blvd., Suite 601, MSC 7669  
Rockville, MD 20852

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 violations of federal spending transparency law by Georgia State University (GSU) related to their National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded experiments on animals.

**GSU's press release about wasteful and cruel hamster fighting experiments.**

A May 13, 2022 GSU press release describes NIH-funded experiments in which hamsters became hyper-aggressive as a result of genetic engineering. GSU experimenters then placed the aggressive hamsters in small cages with non-engineered hamsters and scored them based on how they attacked each other in staged, video-recorded fights.<sup>1</sup>

According to GSU's published paper and federal spending databases, these hamster experiments were paid for by several grants from the NIH and the National Science Foundation that have received a total of \$1.6 million in taxpayer funds.<sup>2</sup>

**Violations of federal spending transparency law by Georgia State University**

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>3</sup>

**The press release mentioned in this complaint violates this federal law by failing to report the amount of taxpayer funding the grantees spent on these cruel and wasteful**

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<sup>1</sup> “Georgia State Researchers Find CRISPR-Cas9 Gene Editing Approach Can Alter the Social Behavior of Animals”, [Georgia State News Hub](#). Accessed 6/2/22

<sup>2</sup> [NIH grant R01MH122622](#), [NIH grant R21MH109302](#), [NSF grant IOS-1035960](#)

<sup>3</sup> Division H, Title V, Sec 505 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (PL. 117-103)

**experiments, the percentage of total costs paid for by taxpayers and how much was funded by private sources.**

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

The current example is troubling, but it is a symptom of a broader problem. A recent WCW report found widespread violations of the Stevens Amendment by institutions performing wasteful NIH-funded animal experiments.<sup>4</sup> This follows a 2017 WCW report documenting Stevens Amendment violations and a growing list of related complaints that WCW has submitted to your office over the last few years.<sup>5</sup>

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) audit that followed the release of WCW's 2017 report cited our troublesome findings and wrote that, "NIH officials stated that they do not specifically monitor for Stevens Amendment compliance."<sup>6,7</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>8,9</sup>

To stem this rampant noncompliance and improve transparency about federal spending, Iowa Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) and Rep. Ralph Norman (R-SC) introduced the Cost Openness and Spending Transparency (COST) Act (HR 1937/S 760) 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.

### **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 GSU accountable for its failure to properly disclose taxpayer funding for their experiments on animals, including withholding future funding.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at [REDACTED].

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<sup>4</sup> [Up In Smoke: WCW Report Exposes Wasteful Cannabis and 'Vape' Animal Experiments](#), WCW Blog, 4/20/22

<sup>5</sup> [New report: Ivy League flunks on animal testing transparency](#), WCW Blog, 4/25/2017

<sup>6</sup> [Feds confirm WCW report on animal testing transparency violations, propose reforms](#), WCW Blog, 3/14/2019

<sup>7</sup> [Agency action required to ensure grantees identify federal contribution amounts](#), Government Accountability Office, 3/14/2019

<sup>8</sup> [NIH grants policy statement \(Sec. 4.2.1\), Acknowledgement of federal funding](#).

<sup>9</sup> [NIH: Notice of legislative mandates in effect for FY 2022](#), 5/9/2022

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Lopez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "L".

Daniel Lopez  
Research Manager  
White Coat Waste Project

cc: Meredith Stein, Acting Director, OMA  
Jeff Hayden, Assistant Director, OMA  
Dr. Michael Lauer, Director OER, NIH Deputy Director for Extramural Research