

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 23, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We are writing to obtain information about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) ongoing use of taxpayer dollars to fund harmful and unnecessary experiments on kittens and cats.

In 2019, the USDA ended a decades-long research program that bred and killed over 3,000 kittens for experiments, including cannibalism studies in which the kittens were fed meat from cats purchased at wet markets in China.¹ The USDA also adopted out 28 cats and kittens from the defunct laboratory.² To our knowledge, this was the last in-house USDA research project involving cats. Subsequently, Congress enacted legislation directing the USDA to develop an agency-wide lab animal retirement policy.^{3,4}

As members of Congress who have worked on a bipartisan basis to standardize lab animal retirement across the federal government and cut spending on harmful experiments on pets, we were disturbed to learn from the White Coat Waste Project and media reports that the USDA has not yet created the lab animal retirement policy requested by Congress and continues to fund wasteful and cruel research on cats.⁵ One recent USDA-funded project studied the effects of obesity on the health of cats confined in a university laboratory.⁶ Documents released to WCW through the Freedom of Information Act and other publicly available data show how in another

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/no-more-kitten-slaughterhouse-government-halts-deadly-cat-experiments-n990011>

² <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/04/02/ars-announces-toxoplasmosis-research-review-discontinues-research>

³ <https://www.congress.gov/117/crpt/hrpt82/CRPT-117hrpt82.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/117/crpt/hrpt392/CRPT-117hrpt392.pdf>

⁵ <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2023/10/18/wcw-investigation-this-lab-breeds-sick-kittens-for-deadly-taxpayer-funded-experiments/>

⁶ <https://journals.asm.org/doi/10.1128/spectrum.00837-22>

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USDA-funded laboratory, cats are locked in small cages, intentionally infected with COVID, and then killed.⁷

The USDA's decision to end its in-house kitten experiments and adopt out the survivors was a step in the right direction, but the problems of harmful USDA-funded experiments on cats and the agency's lack of a lab animal retirement plan apparently persist.

In light of these ongoing concerns, we request the following information:

1. **Cat and dog research:** List all active intramural and extramural USDA-funded research projects involving the use of cats and dogs. For each project, include the project name and number, abstract, research location, cost to taxpayers, number of animals used, start/end dates, and the USDA pain category.
2. **Foreign funding:** Is the USDA funding research on cats or dogs in foreign countries? If so, please list all projects with foreign components and where the research is being conducted.
3. **Lab animal retirement:** Has the USDA enacted the lab animal retirement policy explicitly requested by Congress in FY22 and FY23 spending bills? Detail current USDA policies and practices regarding the retirement and adoptions of cats, dogs and other animals no longer needed in research.

Thank you, and we look forward to your necessary reply.

Sincerely,



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress

⁷ <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/research/awards/202304/mechanisms-underlying-susceptibility-or-resistance-animal-species-sars-cov-2>

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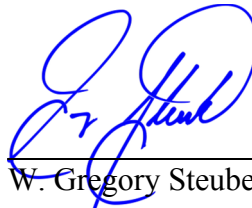
Troy E. Nehls
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube
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