



September 11, 2024

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

Dear Ms. Kearse,

On behalf of White Coat Waste Project (WCW) and its more than 3-million members and supporters, I am writing to alert your office to violations of federal law by Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) related to their cruel and wasteful experiments on cats funded by tax dollars via the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We also request that these noncompliant animal experimenters be debarred from future taxpayer funding.

VIOLATIONS OF FEDERAL SPENDING TRANSPARENCY LAW BY GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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.”¹

As we detail below, a Georgia Institute of Technology news article about their cruel and wasteful NIH-funded experiments on cats violates this federal law.

An article posted on Georgia Tech’s *News Center* site describes the University’s cruel experiments done in conjunction with Drexel University and the University of Sherbrooke where cats had electrodes surgically implanted in them and were forced to walk on treadmills while having their nerves electrically stimulated, after

¹ Sec 505 of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Bill, 2023

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which experimenters state that the same cats would have a spinal cord injury inflicted upon them to undergo the same treadmill and electrical stimulation testing²³.

A search of federal research databases show that the grant acknowledged in the publication has received \$2.8 million of taxpayers' money.⁴

The abovementioned news article violates this federal law by failing to report the amount of taxpayer funding Georgia Tech spent on cruel and wasteful experiments on animals, the percentage of total costs paid for by taxpayers, and how much -if any- 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 report coauthored by WCW found widespread violations of the Stevens Amendment by NIH grant-receiving institutions performing wasteful animal experiments.^{5,6}

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

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.^{9,10}

To stem this rampant noncompliance with the Stevens Amendment and improve transparency about federal spending, Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) and Congressman Ralph Norman (R-SC) have introduced the Cost Openness and Spending Transparency (COST) Act to improve adherence to this commonsense, good government measure and extend it to cover all recipients of federal funds.¹¹

REQUEST FOR ACTION

² [Cat Locomotion Could Unlock Better Human Spinal Cord Injury Treatment](#), Georgia Tech News Center. Accessed 8/20/24.

³ Merlet, et. al, (2022), Sensory Perturbations from Hindlimb Cutaneous Afferents Generate Coordinated Functional Responses in All Four Limbs during Locomotion in Intact Cats..

⁴ Grant awarded to Drexel University: [R01NS110550](#), with subawards ([900052](#)) to Georgia Tech and Université de Sherbrooke for \$1.78 million.

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

⁶ [Up In Smoke: WCW Report Exposes Wasteful Cannabis And 'Vape' Animal Experiments](#). WCW Blog, 4/20/2022

⁷ [Feds confirm WCW report on animal testing transparency violations, propose reforms](#). WCW Blog, 3/14/2019

⁸ [Agency action required to ensure grantees identify federal contribution amounts](#). Government Accountability Office, 3/14/2019

⁹ [NIH grants policy statement \(Sec. 4.2.1\). Acknowledgement of federal funding](#).

¹⁰ [NIH: Notice of legislative mandates in effect for FY 2023](#), 2/3/2023

¹¹ [Wasteful Animal Tests Prompt COST Act Re-Introduction](#), WCW Blog, 3/14/23

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For over 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 but abjectly failed to address it.

We urge you to investigate Georgia Tech's ongoing violations of federal law documented in this letter and debar their cat experimenters from future funding for their repeated failure to properly disclose taxpayer funding.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at dl@whitecoatwaste.org or 202-643-8453.

Sincerely,

Daniel Lopez
Research and Investigations Director
White Coat Waste Project

cc: Charles Haman, Director, OMA
Meredith Stein, Deputy Director, OMA
Dr. Michael Lauer, Deputy Director, NIH Office of Extramural Research
NIH Hotline

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