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ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115
Majority (202) 225-3641
Minority (202) 225-2927

June 16, 2026

The Honorable Jayanta Bhattacharya, M.D., PhD
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Director Bhattacharya:

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce (Committee) is examining concerns arising from federal criminal charges against two National Institutes of Health (NIH) scientists for conspiring to smuggle biological materials illegally into the U.S. and giving false statements to law enforcement.¹ Given NIH's role as the nation's premier biomedical research agency, the Committee seeks to better understand the circumstances surrounding the alleged importation of biological materials, the research activities involving those materials, the adequacy of NIH biosafety oversight, and any corrective actions the agency has taken or plans to take.

On January 25, 2026, two NIH scientists, Dr. Vincent Munster and Dr. Claude Kwe, arrived at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport after traveling to Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, which was experiencing an mpox outbreak.² Upon arrival, they were questioned by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers about a large plastic case in their possession.³ When asked about the case, the scientists falsely claimed that the case contained "diagnostic and testing equipment."⁴

CBP and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) proceeded to investigate this further, finding 113 vials in Styrofoam coolers inside the case.⁵ As of June 2, 2026, the FBI had only

¹ Press Release, U.S. Attorney's Office, E. D. Mich., *Feds Charge Foreign Nationals Working at the National Institutes of Health with Smuggling Monkeypox into the United States and Lying About It* (June 2, 2026), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/feds-charge-foreign-nationals-working-national-institutes-health-smuggling-monkeypox>.

² Criminal Complaint, *United States v. Munster*, No. 26-mj-3013 (E.D. Mich. filed June 2, 2026).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

tested 20 of the vials.⁶ Of the vials that have been tested, 17 contained deactivated mpox virus, 1 contained chickenpox virus, and 2 contained human DNA.⁷

On June 2, 2026, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan charged both scientists with conspiring to smuggle mpox into the U.S. and lying to law enforcement.⁸ Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe both conduct research at the Rocky Mountain Laboratory, which is a NIH research facility in Hamilton, Montana.⁹ This lab is one of eight operational biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) labs in the country.¹⁰ BSL-4 labs are the highest containment safety labs and conduct research into the highest-risk pathogens, some of which have no known vaccines or treatments.¹¹ Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe conduct research into some of the most dangerous pathogens, and their intentions to allegedly smuggle pathogens into the U.S. are unclear. Regardless, the smuggling of biological materials raises serious questions.

To assist the Committee's oversight efforts, please provide written responses to the following questions and requests for documents and information by June 30, 2026:

1. Please provide a list and describe all NIH-funded or NIH-conducted research by Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe involving infectious disease strains or samples.
2. Did anyone at NIH communicate with Dr. Munster or Dr. Kwe about their travel to the Republic of Congo or the subsequent importation of the biological materials that occurred January 25, 2026?
 - a. If so, who at NIH communicated with these individuals, when did they communicate with them, and what was the nature of those communications? Please provide any documentation related to such communications.
3. Prior to the alleged smuggling incident, did NIH possess any information, warning indicators, compliance concerns, or suspicions suggesting that either individual might transport biological materials into the U.S. without authorization? If so, please describe what information NIH possessed and what actions were taken.
4. Please provide a timeline of NIH's awareness and actions of this matter, including when NIH first became aware of the incident, who notified NIH, and the actions NIH subsequently undertook.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Supra*, note 1.

⁹ Adam Cancryn, *2 Researchers Charged with Smuggling Mpox into the U.S.*, POLITICO (June 2, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/06/02/nih-mpox-munster-indictment-montana-00947793>.

¹⁰ Comm. on Anticipating Biosecurity Challenges of the Glob. Expansion of High-Containment Biological Labs., Nat'l Acad. of Scis. & Nat'l Rsch. Council, *Biosecurity Challenges of the Global Expansion of High-Containment Biological Laboratories* (Nat'l Acads. Press 2011).

¹¹ U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., GAO-08-1092, *Biosafety Laboratories: Perimeter Security Assessment of the Nation's Five BSL-4 Laboratories* (2008), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-08-1092.pdf>.

5. Has NIH determined whether Dr. Munster or Dr. Kwe made false statements to NIH or other federal entities related to the importation? If so, what led NIH to that determination?
6. How and from whom did Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe procure these bio-samples?
 - a. Did Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe previously attempt to procure these or any other bio-samples through other means and were denied?
 - i. If so, please provide details about the attempted procurement(s), including what they attempted to procure, when they attempted to procure, the date of the denial, and the rationale for the denial.
7. What laboratories in the Republic of Congo did Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe visit on the trip involved in the incident?
 - a. Did NIH have any agreements with these laboratories for the acquisition and export of bio-samples?
8. Are the biological materials that Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe allegedly imported now considered to be NIH property?
9. Has NIH requested and received access to any of the vials that Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe imported and independently tested those bio-samples? If so, please describe the findings from those tests, including the types of viruses or material contained in each vial, and as applicable which strain of the virus and whether they were inactive or non-viable samples.
10. Please provide information regarding any foreign research-related trips taken by Dr. Munster and Dr. Kwe during their tenure with NIH or NIH-affiliated institutions, including the number of trips taken, the countries visited on each trip, the stated purpose of the trip, and if applicable which trips they were given permission to return with bio-samples.
11. Please provide all NIH policies, guidance documents, training materials, and standard operating procedures governing:
 - a. Acquisition of bio-samples from foreign countries;
 - b. International transport of pathogens and research specimens;
 - c. Disclosure and declaration requirements for imported biological materials; and
 - d. Employee reporting obligations related to foreign travel and foreign research collaborations.

Letter to Director Bhattacharya

June 16, 2026

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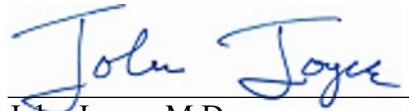
12. Please describe any corrective actions, policy changes, compliance reviews, disciplinary actions, or broader biosafety and biosecurity assessments NIH has undertaken or plans to undertake as a result of this incident.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this request. If you have any questions, please contact the Committee Majority staff at (202) 225-3641.

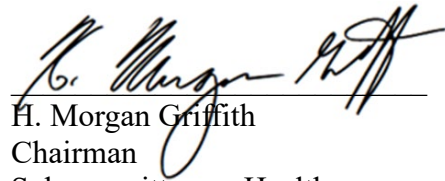
Sincerely,



Brett Guthrie
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce



John Joyce, M.D.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations



H. Morgan Griffith
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health

cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and
Commerce
The Honorable Yvette D. Clarke, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations
The Honorable Diana DeGette, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health