



May 21, 2021

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McMorris Rodgers:

Thank you for your letter regarding the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) support for biomedical research related to SARS-CoV-2, "gain of function" (GOF) research, and the NIH grant to the EcoHealth Alliance. As Principal Deputy Director of NIH, I am pleased to respond to your inquiry.

Neither NIH nor the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has ever approved any grant that would have supported GOF research on coronaviruses that would have increased their transmissibility or lethality for humans.

Some scientists use the term GOF research broadly to refer to *any* modification of a biological agent that confers new or enhanced activity to that agent. In some cases, this research is performed to give new properties to agents to allow them to grow and be studied in the lab; for example, the agent may be modified so that it can be studied in research animals. However, not all research that some label as GOF research entails the same level of risk. The subset of GOF research that is anticipated to enhance the *transmissibility* and/or *virulence* of potential pandemic pathogens, which could make them more dangerous to humans, has been the subject of substantial scrutiny and deliberation.

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued its [Framework for Guiding Funding Decisions about Proposed Research Involving Enhanced Potential Pandemic Pathogens \(HHS P3CO Framework\)](#). The HHS P3CO Framework is intended to guide HHS funding decisions on proposed research that is reasonably anticipated to create, transfer, or use Potential Pandemic Pathogens (PPPs) resulting from the enhancement of a pathogen's transmissibility or virulence in humans (enhanced PPP) and seeks to preserve the benefits of life sciences research involving enhanced PPPs while minimizing potential biosafety and biosecurity risks.

As your letter notes and has been publicly stated, NIH awarded a [grant to EcoHealth Alliance Inc.](#), a research organization based in New York City, in June 2014. The application was subjected to rigorous peer review and did not propose research to enhance any coronavirus to be more transmissible or virulent.

The research proposed in the grant application sought to understand how bat coronaviruses evolve naturally in the environment to become transmissible to the human population. This

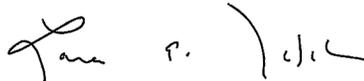
included studying viral diversity in bat reservoirs, surveying people who work in live animal markets or other jobs with high exposure to wildlife for evidence of bat-coronavirus infection, and analyzing data to predict which newly discovered viruses pose the greatest threat to human health. To support its work, EcoHealth made sub-awards to the Wuhan Institute of Virology and other institutions based in East Asia where coronaviruses tend to emerge and are prevalent. NIH is not currently funding the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

I would be happy to further discuss this grant, and this issue, at your convenience. NIH is committed to upholding the highest standards within the conduct of science and the oversight of federal funding.

In conclusion, NIH strongly supports the need for further investigation by the World Health Organization (WHO) into the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. Working with [a cross-regional coalition of 13 countries](#), we urge the WHO to begin the second phase of their study without delay.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address these questions. An identical response has been sent to the co-signers of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lawrence A. Tabak".

Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D.
Principal Deputy Director

cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce