

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 16, 2019

Joshua Gordon, M.D., Ph.D.
Director, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
National Institutes of Health

Dear Dr. Gordon,

Thank you for your service to our nation's health. I am concerned to find that the National Institutes of Mental Health is subjecting small animals to several controversial tests in its laboratories. The videos recorded by NIMH experimenters and obtained by PETA show small animals frantically swimming to keep from drowning, struggling to right themselves as they are hung up by their tails, and jolting across cages in a vain attempt to get away from inescapable electric shocks.

It's my understanding that evidence shows that these tests—the forced swim, tail suspension, and foot shock tests—are not helping to address mental health issues experienced by humans. The forced swim and tail suspension tests have been particularly criticized by many in your field for not being “models of depression,” as those who use the tests claim, and these experts have noted that an animals' amount of movement when swimming to keep their head above water or dangling from their tail is not a proxy for a human's experience of “despair.” Additionally, some data indicate that the ability of these tests to identify potential new antidepressants is less than a coin toss. Overall, the use of tests such as these has been cited as a major contributor to the failure of new drugs to address mental health disorders.

According to the NIMH's website, nearly 20 percent of U.S. adults and half of U.S. adolescents live with a mental disorder. This is a deeply concerning matter to me. Our government, which funds mental health research through our taxpayers, must make the best possible use of its resources and employ only human-relevant and scientifically valid research methods to tackle this mental health crisis.

Given this, can you share your timeline for phasing out these tests in favor of more modern methods?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress