

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 9, 2020

Joshua Gordon, M.D., Ph.D.
Director, National Institute of Mental Health
National Institutes of Health
6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 6200
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

Dear Dr. Gordon,

Thank you for your service to our nation's health. We are writing to request that the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) provide a timeline to phase out its support of the forced swim test, tail suspension test, foot shock, and social defeat experiments on animals.

Your office has stated that these tests “have largely failed to reveal translatable neural mechanisms, and lack specificity from a pharmacologic-validity perspective.”¹ You have called the forced swim test “terrible” for most drugs, that its use has amounted to “wasted time and \$,”² and said that NIMH is “discouraging the use of certain behavioral assays, including the forced swim and tail suspension test, as models of depression.”³ Yet, you state “NIMH will continue to fund such studies.”⁴

A recently published study funded by NIMH found that the numerous “failures in the use of [the] mouse for preclinical studies” might have occurred because there are “so many differences in the cellular patterning of genes” between mice and humans.⁵ Indeed, the use of mice and other animals for depression research, particularly when it involves crude and cruel tests such as the ones in the [video](#), has been cited as a major contributor to the failure of new drugs to treat this condition.

According to the NIH Grants Policy Statement, “NIH is the steward of medical and behavioral research for the Nation. Its mission is to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.”⁶ Depression is not only devastating for the patient and their loved ones, but it is the leading cause of disability for people aged 15–44 years and is a huge

¹ Gordon JA. A Hypothesis-Based Approach: The Use of Animals in Mental Health Research. Available at https://www.nimh.nih.gov/about/director/messages/2019/a-hypothesis-based-approach-the-use-of-animals-in-mental-health-research.shtml?utm_source=rss_readers&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=rss_summary.

² @NIMHDirector. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/NIMHDirector/status/1072609161047871494>. December 11, 2018.

³ Reardon S. Depression researchers rethink popular mouse swim tests. July 18, 2019. Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02133-2>.

⁴ Reardon

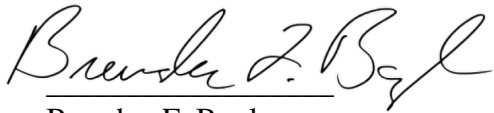
⁵ Hodge RD, Bakken TE, Miller JA, *et al*. Conserved cell types with divergent features in human versus mouse cortex. *Nature*. 2019;573:61-68.

⁶ National Institutes of Health. NIH Grants Policy Statement. Available at <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/nihgps/nihgps.pdf>.

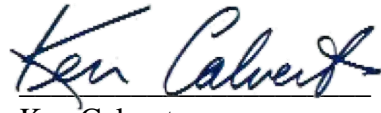
economic burden, with estimates of a \$210.5 billion annual incremental cost (2010).⁷ Citizens deserve the very best science.

We urge NIMH to commit to ending their conduct and support of the forced swim and tail suspension tests as well as the use of foot shock and social defeat experiments on animals.

Sincerely,



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Ken Calvert
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

⁷ Greenberg PE, Fournier A, Sisitsky T, Pike CT, Kessler RC. The economic burden of adults with major depressive disorder in the United States (2005 and 2010). *J Clin Psychiatr.* 2015;76(2):155-162.