

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

March 15, 2021

Dennis E. Hoyle  
Rhode Island Auditor GeneralVia e-mail: [dennis.hoyle@rioag.gov](mailto:dennis.hoyle@rioag.gov)

Dear Mr. Hoyle:

Thank you in advance for your time. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide to follow up on our letter to you dated September 15, 2020,<sup>1</sup> and to share troubling new information we have obtained through Rhode Island Access to Public Records Act (APRA) requests concerning the apparent waste of state resources allocated to animal experiments at the University of Rhode Island (URI).

**Based on the information presented below, we request, as part of any audit that your office pursues of this matter that you: 1) seek reimbursement of any and all state funds used to acquire, breed, confine, and/or maintain the animals used in experiments whom URI categorized as unnecessary, extraneous, noncritical, non-essential, ramped down, disposable, nonpriority, and/or described using similar terminology and—according to documents obtained by PETA through ARPA requests—euthanized in response to COVID-19; and 2) ensure that current state-funded research activities involving such animals are permanently terminated, that new state-funded research activities that include such animals are no longer approved, and that the breeding and acquisition of such animals for state-funded research activities are prohibited.**

### **Euthanizing Unnecessary Animals in URI Experiments Wastes Taxpayer Funds**

In FY2020, URI totaled over \$81 million in state appropriations,<sup>2</sup> part of which may have been used to support animal experimentation activities. According to new documents obtained by PETA through ARPA requests, animals assigned to the following protocols—which likely also involve the use of Rhode Island state money, personnel, property, equipment, and

<sup>1</sup>People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (2020). *Letter to the Rhode Island State Auditor*. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-09-15-Letter-to-RI-Auditor-re-Apparent-Wasteful-Practices-at-URI.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>URI. (n.d.). *University of Rhode Island FY2021 Budget Request*. <https://web.uri.edu/budget/files/URI-FY20-Alloc-FY21Req-FY22Prelim-Req-Abbreviated-Post-to-Web.pdf>

Washington, D.C.  
1536 16th St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-483-PETALos Angeles  
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90026  
323-644-PETANorfolk  
501 Front St.  
Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-PETABerkeley  
2855 Telegraph Ave.  
Ste. 301  
Berkeley, CA 94705  
510-763-PETAInfo@peta.org  
PETA.org

## Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

space by URI for such activities—were killed in response to a directive issued by URI amid the COVID-19 pandemic in which the university instructed staff to “draw down [their] research and campus-based scholarly activities”<sup>3</sup> and stated that “[n]on-critical research should be curtailed as much as possible”<sup>4</sup>—both of which led to the apparent destruction of animals deemed extraneous by URI:

- The protocol titled “Surgical Cardioprotection Through BKCA-Dependent Modulation of Mitochondrial Supercomplexes” is led by URI’s Richard Clements.<sup>5,6</sup> Related e-mail correspondence with a university research technician mentions “culling old breeders,”<sup>7</sup> referring to euthanizing elderly animals.
- The protocol titled “Epidermal Powder Drug/Vaccine Delivery Via Skin Microchannels” is led by URI’s Xinyuan Chen,<sup>8</sup> who called for a “plan to euthanize [mice] and only keep a few for breeding purposes.”<sup>9</sup>
- The protocol titled “Maintenance of FXR and ERalpha-Knockout Mouse Breeding Colony”<sup>10</sup> is led by a URI experimenter (name redacted). Correspondence among university staff revealed that experimenters euthanized 14 mice on this protocol, and plans are/were in place to euthanize 13 cages of mice on this protocol in order to reduce the number of animals being maintained.<sup>11</sup>

URI’s “Lab Animal COVID-19 Emergency Procedures” guideline gave explicit instructions regarding the culling of animals deemed extraneous in response to COVID-19, telling experimenters to “[e]uthanize all old breeders,” “[c]onsider euthanizing males if there are several of the same strain,” and “[e]uthanize or separate extra breeders.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *COVID-19 Laboratory Research*.

<https://web.uri.edu/research-admin/externalrelations/news/covid-19-laboratory-research/>

<sup>4</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *Research Resumption Plan*. <https://web.uri.edu/research-admin/externalrelations/news/transition-from-phase-2-to-phase-3-uri-research-resumption-plan/>

<sup>5</sup>NIH. (n.d.). *Surgical Cardioprotection Through BKCA-Dependent Modulation of Mitochondrial Supercomplexes*. Project Number: 5R01HL135236-02. Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tools (RePORT): Project Information. [https://projectreporter.nih.gov/project\\_info\\_details.cfm?aid=9744774&icde=53799442](https://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_info_details.cfm?aid=9744774&icde=53799442)

<sup>6</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *FOIA Documents—Records From URI 4 Research Protocols*. IACUC Protocol # AN1920-007. [https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-02-16-Records-from-URI-4-research-protocols.msg\\_.pdf](https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-02-16-Records-from-URI-4-research-protocols.msg_.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *FOIA Documents—Email Correspondences*. Sub: F333/Protocol AN 1920-007 /Weaning Errors. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/20201231122934309.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *FOIA Documents—Records From URI 4 Research Protocols*. IACUC Protocol # AN1415-009. [https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-02-16-Records-from-URI-4-research-protocols.msg\\_.pdf](https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-02-16-Records-from-URI-4-research-protocols.msg_.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *FOIA Documents—Email Correspondences*. Sub: RE: COVID-19—ANIMAL WELFARE—PLEASE READ—ACTION REQUIRED. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/20201231122934309.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *APRA Documents—Records From URI 4 Research Protocols*. IACUC Protocol #AN12-01-013. [https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-02-16-Records-from-URI-4-research-protocols.msg\\_.pdf](https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-02-16-Records-from-URI-4-research-protocols.msg_.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *APRA Documents—Email Correspondences*. Sub: Re: COVID-19 Emergency Procedures/ Colony Management. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/20201231122934309.pdf>

<sup>12</sup>University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *FOIA Documents—Lab Animal COVID-19 Emergency Procedures*. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/20201231122934309.pdf>

The fact that laboratories led by URI employees had animals deemed unnecessary, extraneous, noncritical, non-essential, or similar terminology should raise significant red flags, especially since their experiments are funded and/or supported by taxpayers who should not have to foot the bill for such waste.

### **URI Protocols Failed to Reduce and Replace Animal Use**

The presence of unnecessary, non-essential, noncritical, or extraneous animals in URI laboratories flies in the face of existing regulations designed to minimize the use of animals in experiments.

Government policy language requiring the minimization of the experimental use of animals is present in the Health Research Extension Act of 1985, the National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993, the eighth edition of the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, and the U.S. Government Principles for the Utilization and Care of Vertebrate Animals Used in Testing, Research, and Training:

- The Health Research Extension Act of 1985 states, “The Director of NIH shall require each applicant for a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement involving research on animals ... to include in its application or contract proposal ... (1) assurances satisfactory to the Director of NIH that ... (B) scientists, animal technicians, and other personnel involved with animal care, treatment, and use by the applicant have available to them instruction or training in the ... use of *research or testing methods that limit the use of animals* or limit animal distress.”<sup>13</sup> [*Emphasis added.*]
- The National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993 states, “The Director of NIH ... shall prepare a plan ... for the National Institutes of Health to conduct or support research into ... *methods of such research and experimentation that reduce the number of animals used in such research.*”<sup>14</sup> [*Emphasis added.*]
- The eighth edition of the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* states, “The *Guide* ... endorses the following principles: *consideration of alternatives (in vitro systems, computer simulations, and/or mathematical models) to reduce or replace the use of animals.*”<sup>15</sup> [*Emphasis added.*]
- The U.S. Government Principles for the Utilization and Care of Vertebrate Animals Used in Testing, Research, and Training (1985) states, “The animals selected for a procedure should be of an appropriate species and quality and *the minimum number required to obtain valid results.*”<sup>16</sup> [*Emphasis added.*]

When URI experimenters buy, breed, trap, and/or use animals who at any time—not just during the COVID-19 pandemic—can be deemed to be unnecessary, non-essential, noncritical, extraneous or described using similar terminology, they squander limited research funds, some of

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<sup>13</sup>Health Research Extension Act of 1985, Publ. L. No. 99–158. (1985). <https://olaw.nih.gov/policies-laws/hrea-1985.htm>

<sup>14</sup>NIH Revitalization Act of 1993, Publ. L. No. 103–43. (1993). <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/pl103-43.pdf>

<sup>15</sup>National Research Council Committee for the Update of the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. (2011). *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*. <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/guide-for-the-care-and-use-of-laboratory-animals.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>National Research Council Committee for the Update of the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. (2011). *Appendix B: U.S. Government Principles for the Utilization and Care of Vertebrate Animals Used in Testing, Research, and Training*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK54048/>

which are likely provided by Rhode Island taxpayers, and flout the bedrock “3Rs” principle of reducing, replacing, and refining the use of animals in experimentation that is enshrined in government regulations and policies.

Under this standard, the number of unnecessary, non-essential, noncritical, or extraneous animals used in the aforementioned experiments should have been zero from the start, since they weren’t relevant to the protocols led by URI’s employees. Also, since state taxpayer funds were likely used to acquire, breed, confine, and/or maintain these unnecessary, non-essential, noncritical, or extraneous animals who were then so easily euthanized and disposed of in response to COVID-19, URI should reimburse the state of Rhode Island for this fiscal waste.

Furthermore, the Congressional Research Service has found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, “Suspending research may result in additional costs for activities such as animal care” and “[r]estarting research, when conditions permit, may also incur costs for staff time and supplies to . . . reestablish laboratory animal populations.”<sup>17</sup> Rhode Island taxpayers should not be responsible for any of the additional costs associated with “reestablishing laboratory animal populations,” since URI deemed many of them to be unnecessary, non-essential, noncritical, or extraneous to the experiments and because repopulating animals in laboratories at the taxpayers’ expense would appear to violate the aforementioned federal regulations and policies that mandate minimizing the use of animals in experiments.

### **Request for Research Accountability**

This information seems to corroborate the apparent waste of state funds by URI on activities supporting experiments—and/or on the animals used in them—that the school deemed unnecessary, extraneous, noncritical, non-essential, ramped down, disposable, or nonpriority or described using similar terminology and euthanized in response to COVID-19. Such seeming waste of precious resources by URI does a disservice to the research enterprise, Rhode Island taxpayers, and the animals who were killed.

We urge you to audit URI’s actions in this matter and, if you corroborate the issues that we have raised, hold the university accountable by requiring it to reimburse Rhode Island for apparent fiscal waste of state taxpayer funds with respect to the university’s animal experiments and also ensure that current state-funded research activities involving such animals are permanently terminated, that new state-funded research activities that include such animals are no longer approved, and that the breeding and acquisition of such animals for state-funded research activities be prohibited.

We will share with your office any new, relevant information that we receive in this regard. If you have any questions, please contact me at [ShalinG@peta.org](mailto:ShalinG@peta.org) or 757-962-8325. We look forward to your reply regarding this important matter. Thank you.

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<sup>17</sup>Congressional Research Service. (2020, April 10). *Effects of COVID-19 on the Federal Research and Development Enterprise*. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46309>

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shalin G. Gala". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "S" that extends to the left.

Shalin G. Gala  
Vice President, International Laboratory Methods  
Laboratory Investigations Department