

**BENJAMIN F. KRAMER**  
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Finance Committee  
Energy and Public Utilities Subcommittee



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*The Senate of Maryland*  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

June 13, 2022

Ronald J. Daniels, L.L.M., J.D.  
President  
Office of the President  
242 Garland Hall  
Johns Hopkins University  
3400 N. Charles St.  
Baltimore, MD 21218

Dear President Daniels,

I am writing to follow up on my February 18, 2022, letter to you, for which I never received a reply. As you know, Johns Hopkins University (JHU) Assistant Professor Shreesh Mysore is conducting disturbing experiments on barn owls for his National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded project titled “Multisensory competition and spatial selection: Neural circuit and computational mechanisms” (NIH project number R01EY027718).

I had previously pointed out that these experiments have not only cost taxpayers more than \$1.9 million, but have also violated Maryland state regulations given Professor Mysore’s failure to obtain the requisite permits from the years 2015 through 2018 from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to possess barn owls for experimentation. According to public records obtained by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and shared with me, JHU’s vice dean for research, Dr. Denis Wirtz, admits to the university’s “temporary administrative lapse in the DNR possession permit,” which resulted in Professor Mysore’s failure to obtain legally required DNR permits in order to possess barn owls for his experiments.

These permits are not a perfunctory formality but rather a legal requirement in Maryland, per Md. Code Regs. 08.03.09.06(B). The DNR confirmed Professor Mysore’s lack of such permits during this timeframe, stating in a letter to Professor Mysore dated March 4, 2021, that, “We understand that you are continuing your research under a renewed permit but need to remind you that operating under an inactive permit is a violation and subject to potential enforcement action and foreclosure of the research project.”

In his NIH grant application, Professor Mysore states that the owls “will be euthanized ...” upon completion of his experiments, despite Maryland Code, Natural Resources § 10-909 that explicitly prohibits such practices. In a letter to Professor Mysore dated May 12, 2022, the DNR “revoked”

his permit, citing that conditions in it were “inconsistent” with this statute, and the agency issued him a new permit that “disallows ... euthanizing the birds.”

The multi-layered failure of oversight in this matter—by Professor Mysore, JHU, NIH and DNR—to ensure that publicly-funded experiments on animals proceed in accordance with the law is shocking. Professor Mysore’s repeated contraventions of state law also appears to violate Section 2.3.6 of the NIH Grant Policy Statement (NIHGPS) that requires “compliance with applicable State and local laws and ordinances.”

As I mentioned in my letter to you earlier this year, these experiments on owls have been a source of great public concern and appear to render no concrete translatability to human health according to the National Institutes of Health’s own analytical tool. Professor Mysore’s publications from these experiments on owls report a meager 5% “approximate potential to translate” to human health outcomes.

In light of the fact that Professor Mysore’s experiments require the mutilation of the owls, I am specifically asking if his experiments have been terminated as of the May 12, letter from DNR (and the issuance of the new permit) expressly prohibiting Professor Mysore’s killing the owls?

I find it astounding that JHU, which receives millions of taxpayer dollars, on an annual basis, has so flagrantly disregarded Maryland State Law and allowed the owls to be killed.

Thank you and I look forward to your response, despite your having ignored my previous correspondence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben F. Kramer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Senator Ben Kramer