



November 1, 2022

Lee C. Bollinger, J.D.
President
Columbia University

Via e-mail: officeofthepresident@columbia.edu

Dear President Bollinger:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals U.S.—PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters globally—to request that you take personal responsibility for addressing the chronic and egregious animal welfare violations that characterize the treatment of vulnerable animals in Columbia's laboratories.

In our [April 8, 2020, correspondence](#), we shared serious concerns about failing oversight in Columbia's animal experimentation program. We cited documentation that animals were used in unapproved procedures and then killed—in addition, they died from starvation and dehydration. We urged the university to take action to address its alarming culture of disregard for basic animal welfare, but the problems persist and animals continue to suffer there. According to records obtained by PETA U.S. through the Freedom of Information Act, Columbia reported 22 violations of federal animal welfare guidelines in its laboratories to the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare between 2017 and 2022.

These records reveal that several experimenters deviated from approved protocols and conducted experiments with or otherwise used animals not included in protocols that the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) had approved—suggesting systemic problems in the school's experimentation program. In one incident, two surgical procedures were conducted in tandem on a nonhuman primate without approval. In another incident, experimenters infected a guinea pig with an unapproved virus.

Employees' negligence has resulted in suffering and death for numerous animals at Columbia. For example, two nonhuman primates were put on water restriction for 40 days, even though they weren't actively being studied at that time, and a baboon wasn't given any water for three days. More than 122 adult mice and their pups died from dehydration. Some were cannibalized because experimenters had failed to provide access to water. Experimenters also failed to monitor the animals or recognize signs of distress and dehydration. Mice in four cages were found without food, water, or bedding. In another incident, mice in as many as 30 moldy cages were housed in severely crowded conditions in an unapproved location for days, with scarce food and water. Reports state that an undetermined number of mice were affected or died. Seven mice died and 23 others were euthanized after it was discovered that they had been subjected to unapproved fecal transplant surgeries. Among other serious issues, mouse pups were killed by hypothermia—

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an unapproved method. Another mouse drowned in a behavioral testing pool in which the water was much colder than the protocol approved. The experimenter then left the dead mouse in the pool.

Some experimenters hadn't been trained or approved to perform procedures on animals. For example, daily health checks weren't done on frogs and the lab member wasn't formally trained or listed on the protocol. In separate incidents, experimenters used poor aseptic techniques while subjecting mice to surgical procedures, used unapproved drugs or failed to administer analgesia postoperatively, or conducted activities in unapproved locations. In other incidents, laboratories had ongoing issues with severely crowding mice, likely adding to the animals' pain and distress.

Experimenters in the school's labs, including a veterinarian, failed to maintain animal medical records as required by protocol and even **falsified records**. An experimenter responsible for administering drugs to a nonhuman primate who underwent total body irradiation, which causes suppression of the body's immune system, checked off boxes in the animal health records indicating that drugs had been administered to the animal. However, the person then neglected to monitor the animal or give drugs to the animal over two weekends. In another incident, animal medical record-keeping by a veterinarian associated with a skin lesion case on a nonhuman primate were determined to be sparse, even though the veterinarian responsible for them had previously been counseled regarding their medical record keeping. The record indicated that the communication skills of the veterinarian responsible for the records were ineffective and that the person wasn't open to the suggestions and ideas of others.

In fiscal year 2021, Columbia received over \$640 million in taxpayer funds from NIH. Funding agencies—and the public—expect that institutions will comply with minimum animal welfare regulations and guidelines with the provision of such funding. The university's failures are an abject violation of the public's trust.

Columbia's negligence and disregard for basic animal welfare must not be allowed to continue. Such problems will persist unless strong deterrents are implemented. The university should inform principal investigators that if they violate federal animal welfare regulations or guidelines in connection with their laboratories, the IACUC will withdraw approval for the protocol, revoke the investigators' animal experimentation privileges, and permanently prohibit their access to all animal laboratories. We ask that you address this serious matter immediately and implement PETA scientists' [Research Modernization Deal](#)—a strategy for replacing animal experiments with modern, human-relevant, animal-free research methods.

I'm available to discuss these issues with you and can be reached at 541-848-7465 or AndreaK@peta.org. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



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