



May 11, 2023

Robert M. Gibbens, D.V.M.  
 Director, Animal Welfare Operations  
 Animal Care  
 Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture

Via e-mail: [Robert.M.Gibbens@usda.gov](mailto:Robert.M.Gibbens@usda.gov); [ac.complaints@usda.gov](mailto:ac.complaints@usda.gov)

Dear Dr. Gibbens:

Thank you in advance for your time. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters worldwide. **Based on the cited reports from Johns Hopkins University (JHU) to the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) involving the school's experiments on rabbits and a pig, which constitute a violation of the Public Health Service (PHS) Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, we urge your office to investigate this disturbing matter and take all appropriate actions to hold JHU accountable for its noncompliance pursuant to the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and associated regulations.**

#### Reported PHS Noncompliance Appears to Violate the AWA

- A pig assigned to cardiac ablation experiments underwent testing procedures *after* the protocol had expired, and the experimenter failed to submit a renewal application, which constituted a “serious noncompliance”—as voted unanimously by JHU’s Animal Care and Use Committee (ACUC)—of the PHS Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals.<sup>1</sup>
- In a set of cancer experiments, one of the rabbits being experimented on endured a heightened tumor burden in the liver that surpassed the designated “humane endpoints.” The aggressive tumor metastasized to the lungs, and a veterinary resident found the rabbit in severe distress.<sup>2</sup>
- Rabbits assigned to traumatic brain injury experiments—which also were supported with federal funding<sup>3</sup>—experienced post-operative complications after a surgical procedure. The incision on one of the rabbits had burst open at the skull, a second rabbit was found with an infection at the surgical site, and the third was found with neurological issues, which required a “humane endpoint” (i.e., euthanasia). Further

<sup>1</sup>JHU and OLAW. Animal Welfare Assurance #A3272-01, OLAW Case 2R. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2022-12-14-case-2r.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>JHU and OLAW. Animal Welfare Assurance #A3272-01, OLAW Case 2T. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2023-01-27-case-2t.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>NIH RePORTER. Grant # R01NS113140. National Institutes of Health. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/NfsqgXATqkGPZJCvWOpAPg/projects>

PEOPLE FOR  
 THE ETHICAL  
 TREATMENT  
 OF ANIMALS

Washington  
 1536 16th St. N.W.  
 Washington, DC 20036  
 202-483-PETA

Los Angeles  
 2154 W. Sunset Blvd.  
 Los Angeles, CA 90026  
 323-644-PETA

Norfolk  
 501 Front St.  
 Norfolk, VA 23510  
 757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org  
 PETA.org

#### Entities

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

investigation by the attending veterinarians suggested “poor aseptic technique during surgeries and inadequate monitoring after intervention.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1985, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle worked together to strengthen protections for animals in laboratories in order to address deep-seated ethical concerns held by the American public regarding the use of animals in experiments. Polling by the Pew Research Center found that more than 50% of U.S. adults oppose the use of animals in experiments,<sup>5</sup> and other surveys suggest that the support of the shrinking group that continues to accept animal experimentation is contingent on the existence and enforcement of stringent regulations aimed at protecting animals.<sup>6</sup>

In FY 2022, JHU received \$839,852,301 from NIH, and it has received \$283,600,120 from the agency so far in FY 2023.<sup>7,8</sup> According to the agency, an estimated 47% of those funds supported projects that involved experiments on animals.<sup>9</sup> Institutions that receive funding from PHS agencies like NIH are required to comply with PHS Policy. Failure to do so violates not only federal animal welfare guidelines and policies but also public expectations that facilities receiving tax dollars to use animals—who are capable of experiencing pain, distress, love, and companionship and value their lives just as we value ours—should at least observe minimal animal welfare standards. Similarly, JHU is required to abide by the AWA and accompanying regulations, which it apparently failed to do in the aforementioned experiments on rabbits and a pig.

### **JHU Has a History of USDA-Reported Violations and Citations**

JHU also has a growing list of other alarming AWA violations that have led the USDA to issue it more citations.<sup>10</sup> According to federal records obtained by PETA, JHU has been cited by the USDA/APHIS for negligence and compromising the welfare of the animals the university uses in experiments,<sup>11,12,13</sup> including the following:

---

<sup>4</sup>JHU and OLAW. Animal Welfare Assurance #A3272-01, OLAW Case 2U. Accessed May 1, 2023.

<https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2022-12-14-case-2u.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>Strauss M. Americans are divided over the use of animals in scientific research. Pew Research Center. August 16, 2018. Accessed April 10, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/16/americans-are-divided-over-the-use-of-animals-in-scientific-research/>

<sup>6</sup>Ormandy EH, Schuppli CA. Public attitudes toward animal research: A review. *Animals (Basel)*. 2014;4(3):391-408. June 30, 2014. doi:10.3390/ani4030391

<sup>7</sup>NIH. NIH awards by location & organization. JHU. Fiscal Year 2022. Accessed April 10, 2023.

<https://report.nih.gov/award/index.cfm?ot=&fy=2022&state=&ic=&fm=&orgid=4134401&distr=&rfa=&om=n&pid=&view=state>

<sup>8</sup>NIH. NIH awards by location & organization. JHU. Fiscal Year 2023. Accessed May 1, 2023.

<https://report.nih.gov/award/index.cfm?ot=&fy=2023&state=&ic=&fm=&orgid=4134401&distr=&rfa=&om=y&pid=&view=state>

<sup>9</sup>National Library of Medicine. 3. Emerging legal trends impacting animal research. Accessed April 10, 2023.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK100123/>

<sup>10</sup>PETA. USDA finds agony for monkeys at Johns Hopkins. Accessed September 19, 2022.

<https://headlines.peta.org/photos-violations-agony-monkeys-johns-hopkins/>

<sup>11</sup>USDA. Inspection report. August 23, 2021. Accessed September 19, 2022. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/210823-jhu-ir-pig-monkeys.pdf>

<sup>12</sup>APHIS, USDA. Inspection report. September 27, 2022. Accessed January 12, 2023.

<https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-09-27-jhu-usda-ir-rabbit.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>USDA. Inspection report. February 28, 2023. Accessed April 10, 2023. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2023-02-28-jhu-usda-ir-dog.pdf>

- A JHU principal investigator deviated from a protocol approved by the university's ACUC by failing to provide pigs with analgesia, claiming that recovery from anesthesia was better without the use of analgesics. JHU veterinary staff were also not consulted on this matter.
- A pig used in a JHU cardiac experiment had a difficult recovery from anesthesia and was later found to be severely injured. A subsequent necropsy revealed that this animal had sustained two broken elbows, which occurred while the pig was being moved from a transport cage to another location. A JHU senior laboratory technician had failed to report the injuries to the university's veterinary staff.
- A JHU laboratory displayed a significant lack of aseptic technique and failed to maintain a sterile workspace—nearly 50% of cranial implants embedded in rhesus macaques by one JHU experimenter resulted in contamination and chronic antibiotic-resistant infections in these monkeys. As a result, the experimenter euthanized the animals.
- Experimenters in JHU's Traylor Laboratory used expired compounds during experiments on rabbits. Two bottles of heparin—one that had expired in 2017 and the other in 2018—and one bottle of sodium chloride that had expired in 2019 were used in these experiments.
- Staff in a JHU laboratory failed to adequately document the deteriorating health of a rabbit who had been implanted with a tumor. The animal's poor health wasn't reported to veterinary staff, thereby violating the study protocol. After the animal was euthanized, necropsy reports revealed a poor body condition score of 1 out of 5.
- A revised protocol dated December 20, 2021, involving experiments on dogs stated that "potassium chloride (KCl) would be administered at [the] rate of 40mEq, 15 minutes into cooling to effect." Contrary to the approved route of KCl administration, a dog was injected intravenously with KCl, went into cardiac arrest, and eventually died.

Given JHU's apparent inability to abide by the most fundamental regulations in place that give bare-minimum protections to animals being used in experiments, we urge your office to investigate the serious matters we have raised and take all appropriate actions against the university.

You can contact me at [ShriyaS@peta.org](mailto:ShriyaS@peta.org). Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,



Shriya Swaminathan  
Science Policy Advisor, International Laboratory Methods  
Laboratory Investigations Department