



August 25, 2025

Richard Hodes, M.D.
Director
National Institute on Aging

Michael Chiang, M.D.
Director
National Eye Institute

Noni Byrnes, Ph.D.
Director
Center for Scientific Review

Sheila Garrity, J.D., M.P.H., M.B.A.
Director
Office of Research Integrity

Via e-mail: hodesr@31.nia.nih.gov; michael.chiang@nih.gov;
bymesn@mail.nih.gov; AskORI@hhs.gov

Dear Dr. Hodes, Dr. Chiang, Dr. Byrnes, and Ms. Garrity:

I am writing to formally request that the National Institutes of Aging (NIA) take immediate action to recover funding associated with the ongoing “Changes across the lifespan in the use of heuristics to guide decision-making” grant (5R01AG063090) awarded to the University of Washington (UW) and led by principal investigator (PI) Michele Basso. I’m also formally requesting the National Eye Institute (NEI) to take immediate action to recover funding associated with the grant “Visual Target Selection for Saccadic Eye Movements” (7R01EY013692), which ended on March 31. Given that all four of Basso’s UW protocols have been suspended by the UW Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) due, according to the IACUC, to a “pattern of protocol noncompliance” and “lack of responsibility” over years, it is inappropriate for UW to accept taxpayer funding from the National Institutes of Health for work that has been riddled with noncompliances and is no longer being conducted.

All four of Basso’s protocols, three using primates and one using mice, were suspended by the UW IACUC on July 17. The committee had an approximately 70-minute conversation about the pattern of noncompliances in Basso’s laboratory and her refusal to accept meaningful responsibility despite multiple letters and meetings with committee members. The noncompliances discussed in the meeting included:

- An October 2022 incident in which a monkey didn’t receive water for more than 24 hours;

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
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- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

- an August 2023 issue concerning a repeated intracranial surgery; the monkey suffered from seizures after the first one, which was not reported to the attending veterinarian;
- an improper June 2024, 2800-mile shipment of four geriatric monkeys, which resulted in one monkey having to be euthanized immediately upon arrival;
- a January 2025 incident in which staff discovered that six macaques underwent significantly more imaging procedures than were approved in her protocol, and;
- the newly revealed instance brought up at the beginning of the discussion, regarding Basso's laboratory continuing to do behavior experiments on monkeys whom Basso had transferred to the colony protocol a month before.

IACUC members were direct and forthcoming about the problems that have plagued the former director's primate laboratory. One member in the meeting rightly declared, "The phrase that keeps coming up in my head is 'tainted well,' and I am worried that **the data that we've taken from these animals up to this point...may not be usable.**" Another stated, "**I was under the impression that if there's noncompliances associated with an experiment, that you aren't actually supposed to use that data to publish on, anyway...It may already not be usable.**"

These elderly monkeys have been subjected to improperly conducted procedures, a number of imaging sessions exceeding protocol limits, unapproved behavioral experiments, and unreported seizures, among other violations. The scope and severity of these deficiencies, as documented by the IACUC, would critically undermine the validity of any resulting data, rendering it unacceptable for publication in any credible scientific journal.

Despite the UW IACUC acknowledging ongoing issues with Basso's shoddy research and pattern of downplaying animal welfare concerns, **UW has accepted \$1,573,961 in taxpayer funding from NIA and \$628,430 from NEI since Basso brought her projects to UW.**

I urge the NIH to take immediate steps to reclaim all grant funds that have been awarded to UW under PI Michele Basso and ensure that taxpayer dollars are not used to support any additional research under these protocols that were suspended after years of noncompliances, blatant disregard of the rules, and a lack of responsibility. Given the PI's history of ignoring veterinarians and being reprimanded by IACUCs at three separate universities now, I urge the NIH to consider barring Michele Basso from receiving any future funding as a principal investigator on NIH-supported research.

Please advise on how the NIH intends to proceed regarding this matter. PETA can provide the recording of the IACUC meeting where Basso's protocols were voted to be suspended to assist with your investigation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Amy Meyer
Associate Director of Primate Experimentation Campaigns
Laboratory Investigations Department
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals