

The AMERICAN ASSOCIATION of
IMMUNOLOGISTS



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May 20, 2020

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Dear Dr. Collins:

We are writing on behalf of The American Association of Immunologists (AAI), the nation's largest professional association of research scientists and clinicians who are dedicated to studying the immune system. As you know, many of our members are deeply immersed in research that may lead to needed vaccines and treatments for COVID-19. This research and development, while potentially lifesaving during this pandemic, will no doubt also help prepare our nation and the world for future pandemics.

We were concerned, therefore, to learn of a decision by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to revoke grant funding for the EcoHealth Alliance project entitled, "Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergence." As scientists who support merit-based peer review, we believe it is important for NIH to explain why this grant – which appears to fund research of great relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic – was abruptly terminated. While we understand there could be legitimate reasons for this action, the NIH response has been unsatisfactory. According to NPR, the email NIH sent to EcoHealth Alliance President Peter Daszak, Ph.D., informed him that, "at this time NIH does not believe the current project outcomes align with the program goals and agency priorities." NIH subsequently refused to answer questions regarding this grant termination or whether NIH had taken similar actions previously. This response is both confusing and troubling. Your explanation could reinforce confidence in the NIH grant review system at a time when many are concerned that world and national events may be politicizing the science we need the most. We support the request made in a community letter organized by our colleagues at the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) for a full explanation of the reasoning for this grant termination.

AAI greatly appreciates your ongoing leadership and support for the nation's medical researchers and remains ready to assist you in these most challenging times.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jeremy M. Boss in black ink.

Jeremy M. Boss, Ph.D.
President

Handwritten signature of Ross M. Kedl in black ink.

Ross M. Kedl, Ph.D.
Chair, AAI Committee
on Public Affairs

Handwritten signature of M. Michele Hogan in black ink.

M. Michele Hogan, Ph.D.
Executive Director