



Members of University Research Committee Jointly File Lawsuit Against University of Washington

Five UW IACUC Members Seek Protection; Fear for Their Families' Safety in the Face of Escalating Harassment, Hostility and Anger by Those Opposed to Animal Studies

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Editor's Note: A photo of several animal activists outside a University of Washington faculty member's home [can be found at this link](#). This image may be used in news coverage. No attribution is required. During this December 2020 harassment, several protestors held printed signs displaying the faculty member's name. That individual's name has been covered in this photo for safety reasons.

Seattle, WA - Five members of a University of Washington committee responsible for reviewing all animal-based research proposals have filed a lawsuit against the university seeking to protect themselves, their families and their colleagues from escalating hostility and harassment from activists who oppose animal research.

One co-plaintiff in the federal suit is University of Washington neuroscientist and faculty member Jane Sullivan, Ph.D. Dr. Sullivan serves as chair of the University of Washington's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), a formal body required under federal law within the Animal Welfare Act at all institutions that conduct animal studies. Staffed by veterinary and health research experts along with non-scientists and unaffiliated members not employed by the university, the committee's task is to review all university proposals for animal-based research, ensure the use of animals is appropriate and request research protocol adjustments as needed to ensure humane animal care.

In addition to Dr. Sullivan, four other members of the University of Washington's IACUC committee, including another co-plaintiff, joined the suit anonymously. Together the five members of the University of Washington community are asking the court to block attempts by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals to obtain their identities and also the names of more than 70 of their fellow colleagues who either currently serve or have served on the University of Washington IACUC committee.



“Our IACUC members are deeply committed to the humane care of animals, and we take our responsibility very seriously,” said Dr. Sullivan. “It can be extremely disturbing for us to be targeted for insults and intimidation. Many University of Washington IACUC members and alternate committee members have expressed concerns to me about their personal safety, as well as the safety of the people and animals they live with, if their names are released.”

The five committee members requested their personal information not be publicly disclosed in the wake of several troubling incidents highlighted in court filings. These include:

- The recent harassment of a University of Washington faculty member at home by a group of protestors. The gathering was organized by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the same group that is now requesting the names of additional University of Washington IACUC members as well as alternate and previous committee members.
- Several threatening emails, letters and voice messages to university staff that have, among other things, referred to health researchers who work with animals as “vile [expletive] humans” adding “I’m going to do what is necessary to stop animal research.”
- A series of hostile/menacing comments recently made by members of the public attending UW IACUC meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic via Zoom. During these meetings, University of Washington labs have been likened to “Auschwitz”, and members of the university IACUC have been compared to “Nazis” and deemed “sadistic”. Note: Individual committee member names are not displayed during these meetings for personal safety and security reasons.

“My clients have a constitutional right to do their jobs and serve the greater public without harassment and threats from certain members of the public who oppose their work,” said Darwin P. Roberts, Goldfarb & Huck Roth Riojas, PLLC, who is serving as attorney for the plaintiffs. “To avoid such harassment, committee members’ names should be protected from disclosure. We’re requesting the federal court issue an order blocking disclosure, and we’re hopeful the court will do so shortly.”

“There’s only one reason a person or group would seek out the names of individual IACUC members tasked with ensuring the humane treatment of research animals: To generate fear and anxiety,” said Paula Clifford, MLA, RLATG, CVT, Executive Director of the biomedical research advocacy group Americans for Medical Progress. “And while these safety threats have not simply come from one individual person or group, we mustn’t forget that in this particular case, the organization seeking this information already has a history of targeting individuals and their neighbors at home.”



National Association for Biomedical Research president Matthew R. Bailey said: “University of Washington IACUC members should be able to perform their duties without fear of harassment or threats. There has been a long and despicable history of harassment and intimidation tactics committed against employees of institutions who engage in humane and ethical animal research. IACUC members and researchers who work with animal models are as deeply committed to animal care as they are to advancing life-saving research. NABR supports the exemption of personal identifying information in open records laws precisely because of such targeting. Instead of painting a target on the backs of IACUC members and researchers, we should support their efforts to improve the lives of both humans and animals alike.”

About Americans for Medical Progress

[Americans for Medical Progress](#) (AMP) is a nonprofit, health research advocacy group that supports the advancement of human and animal medicine through responsible and highly regulated research in animals. AMP informs the public about animal-based research through outreach events like Biomedical Research Awareness Day, news and opinion articles, social media interactions and various online and printed publications. AMP is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charity supported by the nation’s top universities, private research facilities, research-related businesses, scientific and professional societies, as well as by foundation grants and contributions by individuals. AMP’s Board of Directors is composed of physicians, researchers, veterinarians and university officials.

About the National Association for Biomedical Research

Founded in 1979, [the National Association for Biomedical Research](#) (NABR) is a 501(c)(6) non-profit association dedicated to sound public policy for the humane use of animals in biomedical research, education, and testing. NABR provides a unified voice for the scientific community on legislative, regulatory and legal matters affecting the responsible, humane, and ethical use of laboratory animals. Members include more than 340 universities, medical and veterinary schools, teaching hospitals, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, patient groups, and academic and professional societies who rely on humane and responsible animal research to advance global human and animal health. For more than 40 years, and as the only national, non-profit organization solely dedicated to advocating sound public policy for ethical and essential animal research, NABR has worked to safeguard the future of biomedical research.

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