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## Federal Judge Orders Injunction to Protect University of Washington Committee Members Following Home Harassment, Other Threatening Incidents

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**Editor's Note:** A December 2020 photo of a PETA employee and several other animal activists harassing a University of Washington faculty member at home [can be found at this link](#). No attribution is required. The UW employee's name has been removed from activist signs in this photo for safety reasons.

**Seattle, WA** - A federal judge sided with members of a University of Washington research committee seeking to protect themselves and their families from escalating harassment by animal rights activists. U.S. District Judge Richard A. Jones granted a motion for preliminary injunction which prevents the University of Washington from releasing personal information requested by animal activists. If released, the details could be used to intimidate or threaten committee members.

The plaintiffs, nearly all of whom filed suit anonymously, serve on the UW 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. These committees are staffed by veterinary and health research experts along with non-scientists and unaffiliated members not employed by the university. Their task is to review all university proposals for animal-based research, verify the use of animals is appropriate and request research protocol adjustments as needed to ensure humane animal care.

In late February, five members of the UW IACUC committee asked 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 previously served on the IACUC committee. PETA's efforts raised serious concerns for the plaintiffs and their colleagues due to an escalating atmosphere of harassment, menacing statements and threats. These include:

- The recent harassment of a University of Washington faculty member at home by a group of masked protestors. The harassment was organized by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the same group that sought the names of current committee members as well as alternate and previous committee members.
- Frequent hostile and menacing comments directed at committee members and made by individuals attending public meetings. Committee members have been called "sadistic" and "Nazis." Furthermore, UW's health research facilities have been compared by some of these individuals to Auschwitz.



- Several instances in the past where UW faculty received threatening emails, letters and voice messages. One of these persons called researchers “vile [expletive] humans” and said “I’m going to do what is necessary to stop animal research.”

After reviewing initial filings by the plaintiffs, a temporary restraining order was granted by Judge Jones on February 24, 2022, pending additional arguments. Then in Late April, Judge Jones granted a preliminary injunction stating that “public disclosure of the requested records, likely to result in harassment, would violate their constitutional rights to freedom of expression and association.”

“I’m thankful the Court has upheld the First Amendment rights of our IACUC members to associate and speak freely without fear of reprisal,” said Jane Sullivan, Ph.D., a University of Washington neuroscientist who serves as chair of the UW IACUC committee and is the only named plaintiff in the lawsuit. “IACUC members across the country have a right to feel safe as they carry out their federally required and critically important work protecting animals while supporting biomedical research.”

According to the ruling, which [can be downloaded at this link](#), the Court found the existing atmosphere of harassment and menacing actions by those opposed to animal studies constitutes “a loss of First Amendment freedoms” for committee members. Judge Jones also stated this “unquestionably constitutes irreparable injury.”

The Court also rejected PETA’s assertion that the requested information was required for them to ensure the university was meeting federal requirements related to the constitution of an IACUC committee. As the ruling points out, “multiple independent government agencies perform credential reviews, including the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare of the National Institutes of Health, the United States Department of Agriculture, and AAALAC International, a voluntary accreditation program.”

The U.S. District Court ruling is the second major legal victory this year for a research university engaged in necessary health studies with animals. The [University of California, Davis recently announced](#) it had prevailed in a state civil lawsuit filed by PETA. In that case, the group was seeking access to unpublished research data collected by two researchers at the California National Primate Research Center. However, a state Superior Court judge ruled that releasing the material did not serve the public interest. The Court also stated that release of the data would undermine academic freedom and the scientific process while increasing the risk that researchers could face physical harm and harassment from activists. PETA declined the opportunity to appeal the ruling.

“The threat to health researchers across this country and around the world is very real and unfortunately growing,” said Paula Clifford, MLA, RLATG, CVT, Executive Director of the biomedical research advocacy group Americans for Medical Progress. “As recently reported [in Science Magazine](#), scientists who conduct necessary and beneficial research in animals have been longtime targets of harassment, menacing comments and even threats. Now, COVID-19 researchers and public health officials who seek to control the pandemic are facing these very same issues. And the tactics remain consistent. They include threats of physical harm, harassment at home or at work and even death wishes and death threats.



National Association for Biomedical Research president Matthew R. Bailey said: “We are pleased by the Court’s order granting a preliminary injunction to protect the privacy of the University of Washington IACUC members. Animal extremist groups have a reprehensible history of running intimidation and harassment campaigns against those involved in biomedical research with animals. Members of the science community should not have to go to work every day with a target painted on their backs and the Court’s decision is a positive step in the right direction.”

### **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) nonprofit 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, nonprofit 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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