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**BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH GROUPS PROVIDE SCIENCE COMMUNITY
WITH GUIDE ON COMPLYING WITH INFORMATION REQUESTS**

Freedom of Information Act reports increasingly used to harass and target researchers

In response to a tide of threats, violence, and harassment targeting biomedical researchers, three organizations have released a new document called “Responding to FOIA Requests: Facts and Resources” to help researchers understand their responsibilities under the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and state open records laws, and respond to requests for grant information filed under these statutes. The document reflects the growing use of these requests by animal rights extremists who increasingly use FOIA-sourced information to target scientists for harassment or violence, or take information out of context for advocacy campaigns.

“While scientists fully appreciate the important role and goal of the Freedom of Information Act, law-abiding researchers conducting life-saving research are also being targeted for harassment and violence based in part on information contained in federal grant proposals,” said Frankie Trull, president of the National Association of Biomedical Research, which released the publication this week. “Given the growing climate of violence and threats, it is crucial that scientists know what is required – and what is not required – by this law, and how to work with their university counsel to comply without unduly exposing themselves to potential attack.”

NABR joined in a collaborative effort with the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) and the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) to develop the information.

“Responsible animal research has been indispensable to virtually every major advance in brain research over the last forty years, and will be essential to future progress to treat

disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, help families who struggle with autism or mental health conditions, and serve vast numbers of soldiers who are coming home with traumatic brain injury and PTSD," said Michael E. Goldberg, president of the Society for Neuroscience. "Scientists working on these conditions are being threatened, bombed and harassed. This not only affects their families – it will affect fundamental scientific advances if they are driven out of the field. Our members are scientists, not lawyers -- they may not know their rights and responsibilities within the law and we are working to change that."

"It is vitally important that researchers and university administrators understand how to respond appropriately to requests under FOIA and state open records laws," said Mark O. Lively, Ph.D., FASEB President. "While we embrace the principles that underlie public disclosure laws, we also recognize that a careful balance must be struck between keeping the public informed and protecting our scientists. We encourage researchers to speak publicly how the humane use of animals in research contributes to our quest to find treatments and cures for disease and to discuss the laws and regulations in place to protect laboratory animals. This publication provides additional guidance to the research community on complying with open records requests responsibly, satisfying the public's right to know and the security of sensitive information."

There has been an increase in the use of FOIA and state open records laws by animal rights activists to seek information related to investigators and research projects. That information may be used to target scientists or laboratories, sometimes leading to harassment or even violence against researchers conducting life-saving research using animal models. The NABR-SfN-FASEB guide details ten best practices on how to fulfill responsibilities under open records and FOIA requests, while mitigating risks to researchers. It includes examples of commonly requested documents, provides recommendations for establishing institutional procedures to respond to requests, and outlines suggestions to ensure responsible disclosure.

Attacks against researchers have escalated over the last decade. NABR estimates there were 321 incidents of extremist activity by animal rights activists from 1997 to 2009, including firebombings of homes and cars, breaking and entering, vandalism, stealing property and acts of intimidation.

For a copy of "Responding to FOIA Requests: Facts and Resources," click [here](#).