

May 30, 2019

The Honorable John Boozman
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,
and Related Agencies
141 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,
and Related Agencies
722 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Schatz:

The undersigned organizations, representing national academic, medical, and scientific societies, voluntary health and patient advocacy groups, and veteran-focused associations, write to urge you to reject language to restrict the use of canines in medical research included in Sec. 247 of the fiscal year (FY) 2020 House Military Construction, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Related Agencies appropriations bill (H.R. 2475). This language would effectively eliminate life-saving research conducted with canines through the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program that provides immeasurable benefit to the veteran community and all Americans.

The humane, ethical use of animals in research is indispensable for understanding the biological mechanisms of disease and the impact of disease-modifying interventions and treatments. The medical research community is committed to the humane and ethical care of animal used in research. Research animals must be humanely treated, and the approaches specified in the Animal Welfare Act and Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals ensure that appropriate oversight of the research process occurs at VA and other institutions. In addition to rigorous scientific peer review to determine scientific validity of a project, VA animal study proposals (including those that use canines) undergo a comprehensive Secondary Veterinary Review to evaluate the care and use of the animals. Each accepted proposal then continues to be monitored by Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees. Due to the rigor of this process, fewer than one in four research proposals are selected for funding through the VA research program.

Larger animal models, such as canines, are particularly important for understanding a variety of conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, narcolepsy, autoimmune disease, and epilepsy. Canine research models are proposed only when appropriate and scientifically necessary for the research study. VA canine research has led to the development of a [cough simulator](#) used by veterans with spinal cord injuries to cough effectively, which greatly improves quality of life and their ability to stave off deadly infections such as pneumonia. Canine research has also contributed to development of the cardiac pacemaker; transplantation surgery of kidney, liver, heart, and lungs ([Nobel Prize, 1990](#)); the wearable artificial pancreas; insulin ([Nobel Prize, 1923](#)); and [discoveries in 25 other disease areas](#) that disproportionately affect veterans.

Canine models represent less than one percent of all animals in biomedical research, but their role is important based on similarities to human physiology. At the VA, [0.04%](#) of research animals are dogs, and the VA continues to decrease their use of canines where feasible. We support efforts to reduce animal use when scientifically appropriate and further support ethical treatment of all animals, including dogs. In addition, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) February 1 published a [report](#) following onsite assessments of the use of canines at four VA medical centers. OLAW found “that the visited VAMCs [VA medical centers] are effectively supporting the humane programs of animal care and use at their institutions and conducting research with dogs and other vertebrate species in compliance with the PHS Policy, and all applicable rules and regulations.”

Again, we urge you to reject restrictive language to the VA canine research program as included in the House Appropriations Committee-passed bill H.R. 2475. We should not impede humane, ethical scientific research that has demonstrably benefited our veterans. Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to submit our concerns.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Neurology (AAN)
American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS)
American Association of Chairs of Departments of Psychiatry (AACDP)
American Dental Education Association
American Physiological Society (APS)
American Psychological Association (APA)
Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC)
Association of University Anesthesiologists (AUA)
Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology
Blinded Veterans Association (BVA)
National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR)
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University
Society for Neuroscience (SfN)
University of Iowa Health Care