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Congressman Doug Lamborn
House of Representatives
2402 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Lamborn,

On August 27, 2015 you sent a letter to Chancellor Jerry Wartgow and asked that either he, or another authorized representative of the University of Colorado Denver, provide a written response to your letter. I am the Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of Colorado Denver | Anschutz Medical Campus (UC Denver | AMC). My duties as Vice Chancellor for Research include acting as the institutional official for the purpose of overseeing research that takes place both at the Downtown campus as well as the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. The reason I am responding on Chancellor Wartgow's behalf is that in part your letter asks for information pertaining to an NIH funded research project "Humoral Immunity; Astrocyte Injury; and Demyelination in Neuromyelitis" (the "NIH Study") on which a faculty member in the School of Medicine, Dr. Jeffrey Bennett, MD PhD is Principal Investigator. However, before I discuss the NIH Study I want to address some of the other issues raised in your August 27, 2015 letter, namely your inquiry as to whether UC Denver | AMC purchases "aborted fetal body parts from StemExpress and Advanced Bioscience Resources, Inc. (ABR)".

Since our receipt of your August 27, 2015 letter we have been in contact with the University of Colorado's centralized procurement office and asked if they have any record of anyone within the University of Colorado, including faculty at UC Denver | AMC, purchasing any type of human tissue or cells from either StemExpress or ABR, Inc. We have been informed by the University of Colorado Central Procurement Office that they have reviewed all purchase orders as well as records evidencing purchases made using the University of Colorado Procurement Card system and they can find no record of any purchases, of fetal tissue, or anything else for that matter, from either StemExpress or ABR, Inc.


With regard to your request for information concerning the NIH Study on which Dr. Jeffrey Bennett is the principal Investigator, no fetal tissue or body parts are purchased from StemExpress, ABR, Inc. or anyone else for that NIH Study. Your August 27, 2015 letter asks for a written explanation of the NIH Study. By way of background, the Bennett laboratory is dedicated to the study of neuro-immunologic disorders. One of these disorders, neuromyelitis optica (NMO), is a devastating disorder of the central nervous system that primarily affects the optic nerve and spinal cord. NMO causes permanent disability such as weakness, vision loss, and blindness in the majority of affected individuals. There is no cure, and there is no approved treatment for NMO.

Dr. Bennett is an expert in NMO. He is a clinician-scientist who cares for NMO patients throughout the state of Colorado and Western region. He participates in clinical trials to elucidate a definitive disease therapy and leads a national biorepository site to collect patient samples for NMO research. One focus of Dr. Bennett's NIH Study is to identify the target of the immune response in AQP4-seronegative NMO patients. The outcome of this research will allow patients to be identified before significant nervous system injury occurs and will allow for the development of novel treatments aimed at the cause of disease.

As part of this multi-year NIH Study, Dr. Bennett infrequently uses human fetal astrocytes (HFAs) as a research tool to help identify potential targets of the immune response in AQP4-seronegative patients. HFAs are not embryonic stem cells. They are fully differentiated, non-neuronal support cells. The cells are not transplanted nor are they manipulated for experimental purposes. HFAs, in combination with other cell lines, may be used to identify antibodies that are directed against astrocytes but are not targeting AQP4. The HFA's that are used for the NIH Study are provided to Dr. Bennett by a PhD colleague at another academic institution. My office has confirmed that the HFAs used in the NIH Study were obtained by Dr. Bennett's colleague constituent with all rules and polices of that colleague's institution as well as all applicable laws. My office has spoken with Dr. Bennett's colleague to verify how the HFA's were obtained, and reviewed the informed consent document used to obtain the cells from the donors. These HFAs were not purchased. NIH research dollars were only spent for overnight shipment of these cells to the Bennett laboratory. The use of HFAs will facilitate the early detection and treatment of patients affected by NMO.

Dr. Bennett follows all Federal provisions regarding the use of human fetal tissues by NIH investigators including but not limited to 42 USC 289g-2, 45 CFR 46.204(i) and 45 CFR 46.206. I assure you that we (UC Denver | AMC) take our responsibilities very seriously and that we comply fully with all State and Federal laws and regulations. Research is important to us, and it is an honor to perform research. One of our main goals of research is to bring the knowledge of that research to the people of the State of Colorado and the world so that disease and suffering can be minimized or cured.

Sincerely,



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