

The Honorable Alex M. Azar, II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

December 21, 2018

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the HIV community and the over one million people living with HIV in the United States that have benefited from publicly funded biomedical research, the undersigned 76 organizations, including many members of the Federal AIDS Policy Partnership (FAPP) and its Research Work Group, write to oppose—in the strongest possible terms—the recent interference by the Administration in scientific fetal tissue research, including humanized mouse models. Such restrictions will severely complicate, and in some cases cease, prospective and promising research into new treatments and a cure for HIV. We recognize and acknowledge the administration’s recent response to the issue in a statement. However, we remain deeply concerned and opposed to the systematic targeting of research that utilizes fetal tissue in the advancement of cures and treatments for diseases of pressing concern, particularly HIV/AIDS.

As highlighted in a recent review,¹ the use of fetal tissue in the bone marrow/liver/thymus (“BLT”) humanized mouse model is critical to address and answer significant research questions, and “these models have supported testing of numerous prophylactic drugs, anti-HIV antibodies, and cellular therapies for prevention of HIV replication and HIV clearance.” Biomedical research using the humanized mouse model plays a key role in the development of HIV therapies and strategies for the prevention of HIV transmission. It is essential that this important scientific research continue unobstructed.

Furthermore, we strongly believe that any political undermining of the established peer review process for research funding based on scientific merit has no place in our democracy and in our nation’s research institutions. Scientists should not have their research projects, which have already been deemed ethically compliant in accordance with federal rules, be placed on hold by disruptive, ideologically motivated “reviews” of their work. We are also concerned that there is a lack of transparency from the Administration regarding the implementation and impact of these restrictions. There has been little notice or consultation with the broader HIV community that stand to benefit from this lifesaving biomedical research proceeding and we do not believe any effort was made to include meaningful input of people living with HIV, which should be a minimum standard for the Administration.

It is vital to allow research that seeks to take on the greatest public health challenges of our time, including HIV/AIDS, to continue at our nation’s heralded and esteemed research institutions.

¹ Walsh N, Kenney L, Jangalwe S, et al. Humanized mouse models of clinical disease. *Annu Rev Pathol.* 2017 Jan 24; 12: 187–215. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5280554/>

Supporting scientifically rigorous, objective, ethical research should not be subject to divisive political partisanship. The late former First Lady Nancy Reagan herself affirmed this notion of rising above party politics in expressing her support for biomedical research using fetal tissue, in its promise and potential of finding future cures and treatments that can save millions of lives.

In summary, we submit this letter to you and call for the full restoration of all curtailed funding support and grant period commitments. We thank you for your attention to this matter. For any questions, please contact the FAPP Research Work Group co-chairs Kevin Fisher, Director of Policy Data & Analytics, AVAC at kevin@avac.org, and Suraj Madoori, Director of U.S. and Global Health Policy, Treatment Action Group at suraj.madoori@treatmentactiongroup.org.

Sincerely,

AIDS United
AVAC
Treatment Action Group

AIDS Alabama
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
American Academy of HIV Medicine
American Atheists
American Medical Student Association
APLA Health
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
Black AIDS Institute
BOOM!Health
Bronx Lebanon Hospital Family Medicine
California Hepatitis Alliance
Caring Ambassadors Program
Cascade AIDS Project
CDG Community
Center for Black Equity
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Chicago Women's AIDS Project
Conant Medical Group
DC Fights Back!
Delaney AIDS Research Enterprise (DARE) to Find a Cure Community Advisory Board (CAB)
Delaware HIV Consortium
Doherty Institute, University of Melbourne and Royal Melbourne Hospital
Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation
Equality California
Equality North Carolina
Equitas Health
FORGE, Inc.
Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, TB and Malaria

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Harlem United
Hawai'i Health & Harm Reduction Center
Housing Works, Inc.
Howard Brown Health
Impact Fund
International Rectal Microbicide Advocates
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
Justice Resource Institute
Lambda Legal
Latino Commission on AIDS
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH)
MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights
My Fabulous Disease
Nashville CARES
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition of STD Directors
National LGBTQ Task Force
NMAC
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Positive Women's Network - USA
Prevention Access Campaign
Prism Health North Texas
Project Inform
Purdue University Fort Wayne
Revision Asia
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Secular Coalition for America
Southern AIDS Coalition
Southern HIV/AIDS Strategy Initiative (SASI)
The AIDS Institute
The Center for HIV Law and Policy
The TransLatin@ Coalition
The Women's Collective
Thrive Alabama
Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico
UCHAPS
Unity Fellowship Church-NYC
UTOPIA Seattle (United Territories of Pacific Islanders Alliance)
VOCAL-NY
Whitman-Walker Health
Witness to Mass Incarceration