

Report on Research Compliance Volume 20, Number 6. May 25, 2023 Groups Decry OLAW's Cures Act Efforts; Report Offers Tactics to Manage Animal Rights Activists

By Theresa Defino

Researchers who work with animals might not be receiving the breaks on administrative and related tasks they'd hoped for—and believe were mandated—under the 2016 Cures Act, judging by recent responses to implementation efforts by the NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW).

At the same time, however, they may find helpful a new report that “seeks to educate the animal research community about the growing threat of animal rights activism and provide broad recommendations to mitigate their legislative, policy, and grassroots campaigns.”^[1]

Federally funded research involving animals generally must comply with the Public Health Service (PHS) Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals and the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*. Some studies are also governed by the Animal Welfare Act, enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In a webinar last year, NIH and officials from USDA described changes they had made related to the Cures Act, including revising the reporting period for the annual report to OLAW to harmonize it with USDA's and allowing institutions that are accredited by the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International to use its program description when they're completing certain sections of OLAW's assurance document.^[2]

More recently, OLAW proposed changes to requirements for reporting noncompliance, but groups representing investigators and research organizations said these were indicative of the agency's timid approach to implementing the 2016 act.^[3]

“We appreciate that OLAW and NIH are moving methodically through the process of administrative reforms,” Ross McKinney Jr., chief scientific officer for the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), wrote in a May 5 response to a request for information.^[4] “But as the AAMC has noted in earlier comments, we believe that the overall response has been too incremental and reserved given the scope envisioned by Congress to ‘make revisions, as appropriate, to reduce the administrative burden on investigators while maintaining the integrity and credibility of research findings and the protection of research animals.’ The AAMC would encourage the NIH and other agencies to engage with the research community in a more extensive overhaul of the current compliance system, for a more effective and responsive deployment of resources that would better ensure animal welfare.”

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