

United States Senate
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400
(202) 224-5364

September 8, 2022

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

Recent allegations of misconduct and conflict of interest in federally funded research on Alzheimer's disease raise concerns regarding the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) obligations to properly manage federal grants. As Ranking Member and Members of the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging, representing more than 5.8 million Americans with Alzheimer's disease and their families is a priority. We are committed to advancing biomedical research that will lead to discoveries for those living with Alzheimer's disease.

On July 21, *Science* magazine published allegations that a research scientist had tampered with images related to hypothesized causes of Alzheimer's disease in a widely cited paper published by *Nature* in 2006.¹ *Science* notes that these allegations were communicated to the National Institute of Health (NIH) in February 2022, but NIH has not responded. Just four months later, NIH awarded a new Research Project (R01) grant to the author in question. *Science* also notes the NIH program officer for the grant was a co-author of the 2006 *Nature* paper.

Given HHS's obligations to ensure integrity in federally funded research, we request that you provide the results of any investigation or consequential administrative actions resulting from allegations of misconduct and conflict of interest. In addition, we request answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent did NIH's scientific review process consider the allegations while the R01 grant application was under review?
2. How did a co-author of the 2006 paper in question remain responsible for reviewing the R01 grant application after the allegation surfaced?
3. How does NIH prevent conflict of interest when employees are making decisions about grants to researchers who have formerly been colleagues?

¹ Piller, Charles. (2022, July 21). *Blots On A Field?* Science. Retrieved from <https://www.science.org/content/article/potential-fabrication-research-images-threatens-key-theory-alzheimers-disease>.

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4. What steps does HHS intend to take to improve early detection and timely response to alleged misconduct involving falsifying and fabricating data?

Please provide your response by October 6, 2022. Your staff may direct any questions or correspondence to [REDACTED]. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Tim Scott
Ranking Member
Special Committee on Aging



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator

c.c.: Dr. Lawrence Tabak, D.D.S., PhD, Acting Director, National Institutes of Health
Dr. Richard J. Hodes, MD, Director, National Institute of Aging