

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 26, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We write to express our concerns regarding current policy at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that may unintentionally allow for federal funding to continue to benefit facilities that are engaging in the mistreatment of animals. Building upon work to reduce and ultimately eliminate unnecessary animal testing within federally funded research, including launching a Food and Drug Administration roadmap to phase down mandatory animal testing in April 2025, we urge you to take immediate action to update current policy regarding the use and acquisition of dogs in NIH-supported research.

As you are aware, Ridglan Farms is a large-scale beagle breeding facility in Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, which continues to hold a USDA Class A breeding license despite extensive evidence of animal welfare violations. There may be an opportunity to further strengthen NIH's current policy for determining a facility's eligibility to benefit from NIH-supported research, particularly by considering additional factors beyond whether a facility holds a USDA Class A license. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) holds the authority to review and update this internal policy and should consider additional factors, including whether a facility has received state-level animal welfare citations or surrendered an equivalent state-level license.

As you know, current NIH policy regarding the use and acquisition of dogs in NIH-supported research was last updated in 2013, when the agency ended the practice of using "random-source" dogs in federally funded research. Since then, researchers have largely turned to USDA Class A dealers, which are larger, commercial animal breeding operations, when determining eligibility for federally funded animal research. Officials at the NIH have indicated that the Class A license is the sole factor taken into account when making such determinations. Considering additional animal welfare information identified through state enforcement actions may help ensure federally funded research continues to meet the highest ethical standards.

In September 2025, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) cited Ridglan for hundreds of counts of mistreatment that demonstrated a systemic level of deficiencies in veterinary care, sanitation, housing conditions, and overall welfare of the dogs. Following this, the facility agreed to a settlement to surrender its DATCP commercial dog breeder license by July 1, 2026. Even in USDA's most recent visit to the facility in January of this year, investigators found that Ridglan *still* did not keep records of treatments performed for

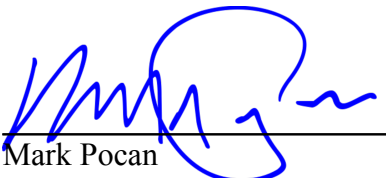
all dogs at the facilities. Despite these findings, Ridglan continues to maintain its USDA Class A license, which under current NIH policy allows the facility to remain eligible for NIH-supported research activities.

At the recent House Appropriations Committee markup of the Fiscal Year 2027 Agriculture Appropriations bill, a bipartisan amendment was passed which added language to the bill that would direct USDA to automatically review a facility's Class A License eligibility in the event that the operator relinquishes an equivalent state-level commercial breeding license. We believe this should be a commonsense practice. If a facility is cited for hundreds of animal welfare violations and forced to surrender state-level licenses, there should be an appropriate federal review process as well to help ensure absolutely no taxpayer dollars continue to prop up an entity that is engaging in inhumane and unethical treatment of animals.

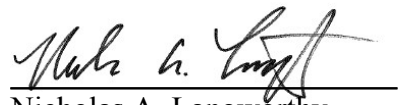
While we are hopeful that this language will improve USDA's oversight of animal breeding facilities going forward, additional review measures may help ensure facilities continue meeting the standards associated with maintaining a Class A license. In the meantime, HHS should consider additional steps to ensure that a USDA Class A license is not the only factor taken into account when determining whether a breeding facility is eligible to receive NIH funding or provide animals to NIH-supported research projects. As the Ridglan Farms case has demonstrated, reviewing these policies may help ensure federally funded research continues to meet the highest ethical and animal welfare standards.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that no taxpayer dollars are being used to fund the mistreatment of animals, that all of the animals at Ridglan Farms find a safe and loving home, and to prevent any situation like this from happening again.

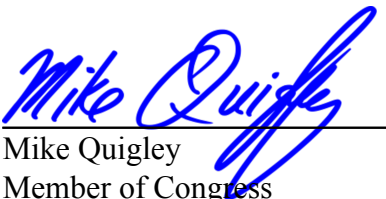
Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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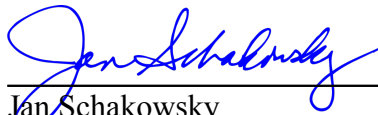
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Member of Congress



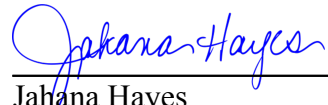
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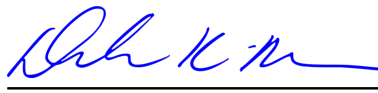
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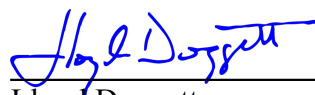
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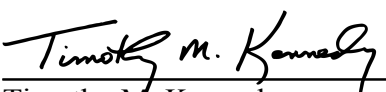
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CC: NIH Director Jay Bhattacharya