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April 15, 2014

Councilor Michael Flaherty
Chairman, Committee on Government Operations
Boston City Council
1 City Hall Square, Suite 550
Boston, MA 02201

RE: Docket #0227 - Ordinance prohibiting research designated as Biosafety Level 4 (BSL4)

Dear Chairman Flaherty,

A previous engagement prevents me from attending tomorrow's hearing regarding Docket #0227; however, I would like to submit the following comments on behalf of the Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals (COBTH). By way of background, COBTH is an organization of fourteen Boston-area teaching hospitals that work together to advance their common missions of medical education, research and patient care. We are deeply concerned by the proposed Boston City Council ordinance that would ban Biosafety Level-4 (BSL-4) research in the City of Boston and strongly oppose passage.

Boston is world-renowned for the excellence of its health care, teaching, and research institutions, and the city's teaching hospitals are the cornerstone of that reputation. Boston is home to the top five independent hospital recipients of National Institutes of Health research funding, funding more than \$1b in medical research. Patients come from across the country and world, but also from around the block, seeking the excellent care and technology available here. Medical students, residents, and fellows are eager to be trained at our academic medical centers. Many of these Boston-trained health professionals become leaders in health care and research at hospitals, research institutions, and private industry throughout the world.

Not only is the National Emerging Infectious Diseases Laboratories (NEIDL) a secure, cutting-edge facility dedicated to the development of diagnostics, vaccines, and treatments to combat deadly infectious diseases, but it is a prime example of Boston's commitment to biomedical research and development. Designed to conduct research at Biosafety Level-2, -3, and -4 with the highest degree of safety for researchers and the surrounding community, the NEIDL is training the next generation of researchers, as well as scientists from around the world, to work safely in high and maximum containment laboratories.

COBTH has worked closely with the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) on its BSL-2, BSL-3, and BSL-4 regulations, the strictest in the country. BSL-3 and BSL-4 research that is proposed by NEIDL researchers will be reviewed and approved by the BPHC before it can begin and details of the proposed projects are available to the public. BPHC also has the authority to stop research projects if necessary.

COBTH Docket #0227 - Page 2

We are confident that these regulations and protocols, which guide how our hospital laboratories operate, provide the necessary safeguards and reporting procedures to ensure the safety of these labs across the City of Boston.

The facility has undergone comprehensive local, federal, and community review, including from the National Institutes of Health's Blue Ribbon Panel Committee, the National Research Council, the Boston Public Health Commission, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and state and federal courts, and will undergo review from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as well. Furthermore, Chief United States District Judge Patti B. Saris also evaluated the Final Supplementary Risk Assessment (FSRA) for the facility and noted in her ruling that: "...the Court is satisfied that the FSRA adequately analyzes the risks associated with building the BioLab, including 'worst case' scenarios and suburban and rural alternatives. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) provides sufficient scientific support for its ultimate conclusions that the risks to the public are extremely low to not reasonably foreseeable, and the differences between the Boston location and the suburban and rural sites are not significant."

When fully operational, the NEIDL will attract further NIH funding and play an integral part in the local life-sciences economy. Supporting research at the NEIDL today will pay a lifetime of dividends in better health and quality of life for all Americans. For millions of patients and their families, medical research is, simply put, the beginning of hope. To turn hope into treatments, into cures, we must sustain federal support for medical research funded by the NIH here in Boston.

On behalf of the Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals, I respectfully ask the Boston City Council to **reject Docket #0227** an ordinance to prohibit BSL-4 research in Boston. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Erwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Erwin
Executive Director

cc Members of Committee on Government Operations