



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL

January 15, 2021

Dr. Stuart R. Bell, President
The University of Alabama
801 University Boulevard
Rose Administration Building
Suite 203
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

via electronic mail

Re: Conclusion of 20 U.S.C. § 1011f Investigation (University of Alabama)

Dear President Bell:

On December 22, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education (“Department”) notified the University of Alabama (“UA”) that it had commenced an investigation of UA pursuant to the disclosure requirements of 20 U.S.C. § 1011f (“Section 117”). The Department’s investigation occurred pursuant to its enforcement authority under Section 117 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. § 1011f, which requires institutions of higher education (“IHEs”) to report statutorily defined gifts, contracts, and/or restricted and conditional gifts or contracts from or with a statutorily defined foreign source(s) to the Department.

The Department’s investigation concerned the published claim of the Wuhan Institute of Virology (“WIV”) that UA, among other American universities, was one of WIV’s international partners. The Department’s search of UA’s Section 117 disclosures to the Department had revealed that no qualifying gifts or contracts indicating an association between UA and WIV had been reported to the Department.

On December 23, 2020, the Department received UA’s first response to the Department’s Notice of Investigation. UA informed the Department that it had initiated its own thorough internal investigation (many months before) after becoming aware of WIV’s published assertion that UA was one of its international partners. UA’s investigation revealed no substantiation in its records for WIV’s assertion of the claimed partnership with UA. The Department then requested that UA conduct another system-wide search of its records to determine if there was any basis for WIV’s published claim of a partnership with UA. On January 14, 2021, UA’s Chief University Counsel, Robin H. Jones, provided the results of the second search of UA records, clearly establishing that there is no known connection between UA and the Wuhan Institute of Virology (“UA is unable to identify any gift, grant, contract, or other relationship indicating any sort of UA partnership with or connection to WIV”).

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Accordingly, the Department is pleased to notify you that it has concluded its Section 117 investigation of UA. It particularly commends UA for acting prudently to initiate its own internal investigation after becoming aware of WIV's unfounded claim and for promptly conducting an additional thorough search of its records following the Department's Notice of Investigation. The Department also commends UA for its ongoing commitment to the disclosure requirements of Section 117 and the Department's statutory enforcement obligations.

The Department recommends to UA, one of our country's premiere university research institutions, the continued prioritization of protecting ongoing research and development activities, often supported by federal taxpayer funds, against conversion, misappropriation, or misuse of critical technologies with multiple applications. The Department strongly encourages UA to continue its related security and compliance efforts with all appropriate federal agencies to safeguard against adversarial access to or acquisition of critical technologies.

On behalf of the Department, thank you for UA's exemplary diligence and its immediate and full cooperation with the Department. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions concerning this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Paul R. Moore

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