

## Testimony of Massachusetts Nurses Association

### On “An Act to Protect the Public and Environment from Select Toxic Biological Agents” (HB 4249)

#### To the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture

June 9, 2005

Good afternoon. My name is Mary Crotty. I am a Registered Nurse, attorney, and Associate Director of Nursing for the Massachusetts Nurses Association. I am testifying in favor of Bill 4249 and in opposition to this dangerous laboratory facility. Prior to coming to the nurses' association, and subsequent to 9/11, I was Director of Hospital Preparedness for the Massachusetts Hospital Association. That was a position funded by the federal government, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and managed by the Massachusetts Hospital Association. I know first-hand the disaster response capabilities and issues of hospitals, CMEDs, EMS, public health departments and first responders across the state.

The Massachusetts Nurses Association, on behalf of the 24,000 nurses it represents, undertook an extensive examination of the lab issue prior to our decision to oppose the lab. Our nurses conducted our own “hearing” with representatives from both Boston University and from groups opposed to the siting of the lab in downtown Boston.

You have a copy in your packet of the Massachusetts Nurses Association's Position Statement outlining the major issues we are concerned about.

Our primary objections to the lab facility are as follows:

➤ **Safety** **Massachusetts was recently ranked as one of the states least prepared to respond to a disaster in the entire country.** While plans may be underway to improve national preparedness, and while there is a need for public health research, a dangerous lab should not be located in a state ill prepared to prevent human error or ANOTHER 9/11 terrorist act.

The types of dangerous pathogens that can be researched and weaponized in Level 4 labs include viruses and bacteria that cause Ebola, Marburg and other deadly hemorrhagic fevers for which there are no cures. An outbreak from another laboratory breach poses the risk of new epidemics that we simply have no experience with and that could be impossible to contain.

➤ **Boston hospitals have no ability to respond if there is an incident. Hospital emergency departments have no extra capacity to handle an average days' visits, let alone respond to the surge from a real or imagined incident at the lab.** Diversion statistics for Spring months in every region of the state increased by as much as 40 percent over just the previous winter months. There is simply not the Surge Capacity to handle the types and numbers of casualties which could result from a disastrous breach at a Level 4 lab facility. Nor is there an effective plan in existence to handle even the current Diversion problems being experienced by hospitals across the state, particularly in Boston.

Patients are stacked in emergency department hallways on stretchers for hours now. Hospitals have to turn away ambulances – that's what "Diversion" is. I can tell you that in the event there is another breach by Boston University which causes morbidity, nurses, hospitals, the city and the state do not have the ability to respond.

➤ **Equity issues: Disparate treatment of racial and ethnic minorities.** Boston University is planning to site this extremely dangerous laboratory facility next to Boston Medical Center, which primarily serves an underserved community in Roxbury, Dorchester and Boston. **While research dollars and jobs** will pour into Boston University, community members gain nothing. Instead they are being placed at risk of enormous bodily harm and subjected to the psychological terror that there will be another breach at a BU lab, with the possibility of a horrendous death from Ebola, tularemia, anthrax or unknown biologically altered organisms.

Residents of the community may suffer even in the absence of any actual breach from stress-related disorders related to the psychological stress and fear resulting from the presence of this type of facility in their backyard. This kind of physical harm from psychological stress has been documented.

➤ **Finally, BU may not be permitted to give notice to the community.** While BU has been busy telling us about the oversight and accountability mechanisms that will now be put into place, **Department of Homeland Security provisions** may prevent BU from providing notice of an accident or incident even if they would wish to share that news with the community.

For that reason alone, the only reasonable thing to do is to NOT site the lab where deadly consequences could have an enormous impact of a major population center.

Thank you.

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