

Written version of testimony from 6/9/05

My name is Alisha Sieminski. I live in Jamaica Plain. I have a Ph.D. in Bioengineering and work as a biological researcher at MIT.

I work in a biological research lab every day. Today I would like to talk about why I favor this legislation from the day-to-day perspective of a lab researcher.

I first want to make very clear that I support scientific and infectious disease research. It is my life to believe in they can improve human health. I also support local regulation and accountability outlined by this bill in addition to the federal regulations.

In my experience, when researchers get comfortable with materials and procedures, even those associated with hazards, they get careless. This is a fact of lab culture.

Further, as a lab safety officer, I know how difficult it is to get the people who work in the lab to follow and take seriously safety protocols and regulations. A related issue is that in numerous institutes, I have observed inadequate safety training of animal technicians and janitorial staff.

Although there are federal guidelines and regulations in place, the reality is that it is largely up to the institutions and the individual Pis to truly oversee implementation. With their refusal to communicate with the community and the recent tularemia accident, BU has violated the trust of the community – how can we believe that they will provide adequate oversight? We need local regulation and accountability.

Additionally, in response to concerns that citizen-based boards do not have adequate background to make decisions on complex scientific issues, I would like to again offer personal experience. In working with various boards needing to approve protocols that are composed of people not necessarily familiar with my line of work, I have repeatedly had the experience that their questioning on why I must do something a certain way has actually led to the improvement of my research design and implementation. Oversight by and accountability to a regulatory committee is not only sensible, it can lead to better science.

As a lab researcher, I'm the kind of person who is on the front line – I don't want to be a "hero" as Dr. Klempner called it.

HD 4249 (An Act to Protect the Public Health and Environment from Toxic Biological Agents) is not a hindrance to scientific progress, it is a necessary step to work as a community for peace of mind and public safety.