



ACE
alternatives for
community &
environment

Safety Net

Media Release

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Residents to Sue to Stop Boston University Bio-terror Lab Proposal

Lawsuit claims BU violated state environmental law

[Boston, MA] Today, a community coalition announced that they will be filing a lawsuit to put a hold on Boston University Medical Center's bid to build a high security biodefense laboratory in the South End. The lawsuit, to be brought by members of the Safety Net, Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE), and other community supporters, charges that BU has violated the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) because it has not completed an environmental review as required by state law. The suit seeks to stop development of the lab until an environmental impact report is completed and approved by the state.

BU is a finalist in competing for federal research and construction funds that could amount to \$1.6 billion in the coming years. There are currently only five Biosafety Level 4 (BL4) labs in the US. These are the highest security research labs that study the most dangerous biological weapons agents, including anthrax, smallpox, and the plague. If successful, the BU proposal would be the first such lab to be sited in the heart of an urban neighborhood.

The Safety Net, ACE, and other community groups across Boston have been opposed to the proposed lab because of concerns over health and safety risks, lack of economic and community benefits, and lack of public accountability and oversight. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will decide in the next few weeks which of the finalists will receive federal funds to build new biodefense labs.

"We are suing BU because they give us no other choice. We have repeatedly requested, and been denied, information and a real dialogue about the threats posed by the lab. Now we go to court to stop the project," said Klare Allen, an ACE community organizer.

In addition to Boston University, Boston Medical Center and BU's development arm, University Associates, the suit also charges the Boston Redevelopment Authority, Massachusetts Division

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of Capital Asset Management, and the Department of Housing and Community Development with violating the state's environmental law. These agencies are involved in giving BU state-owned land and approvals necessary for the biolab proposal.

"We demand accountability from the City and the State. How can the BRA and the State give away our land to BU for this proposal without even following their own laws?" said Donovan Walker, Co-Chair of the Safety Net.

Gene Benson, the ACE Staff Attorney representing the coalition, noted that "this action should send a clear message that BU should not receive federal funds for this biodefense lab. They have not been good neighbors in developing their proposal and in fact have broken the laws of the Commonwealth in the process."

The notice of intent to sue was sent today on behalf of 12 residents. The suit, which is authorized under MGL c.214 § 7A, will be filed in 3 weeks.

ACE is a Roxbury-based environmental justice group working to build the power of lower income communities and communities of color to promote healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities (www.ace-ej.org). Safety Net, an organizing project of ACE, brings together Roxbury residents to advocate for sustainable and equitable development.

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