

# The Role of the ARAC Ombuds in Responding to Animal Care and Use Complaints

## Overview:

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) investigates all Intramural Research Program (IRP) animal care and use complaints quickly and thoroughly, correcting deficiencies promptly, while balancing regulatory compliance with complainant and researcher rights.

## Roles & Responsibilities:

- **ARAC Ombuds:** An experienced NIH animal research scientist appointed by the Deputy Director for Intramural Research (DDIR), who is also the Institutional Official (IO).
- **Duties:** Investigates animal care complaints coming from outside the NIH and reviews unresolved internal complaints upon Institute or Center (IC) request. (See: [DDIR/IO's Policy Memo: Communicating Animal Care and Use Concerns with the NIH Intramural Research Program.](#))
- **Authority:** Serves as a required member of ARAC and as a non-voting member on all IC Animal Care and Use Committees (ACUCs). (See: [NIH Policy Manual Chapter 3040-2 Animal Care and Use in the Intramural Research Program](#)) The DDIR/IO will designate an individual to serve, if needed, in the ARAC Ombuds's absence.

## Investigation Process:

1. **Initial Evaluation:** The Ombuds reviews the complaint and notifies the DDIR/IO, Office of Animal Care and Use (OACU) Director, and the ARAC Chair.
2. **Task Force Assembly:** If the complaint has merit, the Ombuds forms an investigative team consisting of the Ombuds (Chair), non-affiliated IC representatives, an active tenured animal research scientist, the OACU Director (or designee), and appropriate subject matter experts.
3. **On-Site Assessment:** The task force promptly conducts a site visit with full access to relevant facilities, personnel, and documents. Key participants include the Principal Investigators (PI), the Laboratory/Branch Chief(s), the Attending Veterinarian(s) and/or the Animal Program Director(s), the IC Scientific Director(s) (SDs), and IC ACUC Chairs.
4. **Reporting & Resolution:** The Ombuds shares preliminary findings with the IC-ACUC, SD, and DDIR/IO. The IC-ACUC takes formal corrective actions based on the findings. The Ombuds submits a final written report to the DDIR/IO, OACU, SDs, and ARAC. The DDIR/IO may order further independent or IC-led investigations if needed.

## Notification Process:

Based on task force findings, the OACU Director alerts:

- **External Authorities:** OLAW, USDA, and AAALAC International, if reportable.
- **Communications Office:** For public relations management.
- **Security Office:** For potential physical security threats.
- **The Complainant:** Receives a summary response of all actions taken.

Approved by the DDIR: 04/23/1992

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