

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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September 18, 2025

Dr. Peter Pisters
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
1515 Holcombe Blvd.
Houston, TX 77030

Dear Dr. Pisters,

The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology writes to express profound concern regarding the recent arrest of Dr. Yunhai Li, a postdoctoral researcher at MD Anderson Cancer Center (“the Center”). Dr. Li has been charged with theft and tampering with proprietary research.¹ He was detained on July 9, 2025, at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston while attempting to depart for China with a significant amount of proprietary breast cancer vaccine research.² According to reports, Dr. Li allegedly uploaded this research to a Chinese server under the direct influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³ Our Committee is dedicated to safeguarding domestic research at U.S. institutions, and this incident raises serious questions about the efficacy of the Center’s research security protocols as required by federal law.

A Chinese citizen, Dr. Li had been employed at the Center since 2022 under a nonimmigrant research scholar exchange visa.⁴ Throughout his time at the Center, Dr. Li conducted research on metastatic breast cancer funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

¹ John Wayne Ferguson, *MD Anderson Researcher Accused of Stealing Cancer Data, Trying to Take it to China*, HOUSTON CHRONICLE (Aug. 25, 2025), <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/crime/article/md-anderson-researcher-stealing-cancer-data-china-21014946.php>; Harris County District Attorney X Account, *HCDAO Files Charges Against Former MD Anderson Cancer Center Researcher for Stealing Trade Secrets*, <https://x.com/HarrisCountyDAO/status/1960057128179187919>.

² Ferguson, *supra* note 1.

³ *What is Baidu?* TECH MONITOR (July 11, 2022), <https://www.techmonitor.ai/what-is/what-is-baidu-4944773?cf-view#copyright-and-controversies>.

⁴ Ferguson, *supra* note 1.

and the Department of Defense (DoD).⁵ Concurrently, he received grant funding from the CCP-controlled National Natural Science Foundation of China and performed research for the CCP-funded First Affiliated Hospital of Chongqing Medical University.⁶ However, he failed to disclose these affiliations and work history.⁷ This omission is particularly alarming because placement of a foreign researcher on federally funded projects requires compliance with various federal research security protocols.

Specifically, the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 requires institutions to certify that foreign researchers are not engaged in “malign foreign talent recruitment programs.”⁸ National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 (NSPM-33) requires institutions receiving over \$50 million in annual federal funding to implement research security programs that include strict cybersecurity measures, foreign travel security, and export control awareness.⁹ As a recipient of around \$190 million in annual NIH funding, excluding sums from other federal sources, the Center bears a significant responsibility to taxpayers to comply fully with NSPM-33.¹⁰ Moreover, under the Export Administration Regulations, it is best practice for institutions to implement Technology Control Plans to restrict access to sensitive projects by foreign nationals, including researchers.¹¹

Additionally, the research security regime imposes obligations on individual foreign researchers. Foreign NIH grant recipients must disclose foreign positions and foreign financial or in-kind support.¹² Similarly, foreign DoD grant recipients must disclose foreign institutional support, including financial assistance, appointments, and affiliations.¹³ Because these requirements depend on self-reporting, research institutions employing foreign grant recipients should maintain procedures to verify the accuracy of these disclosures.

Dr. Li’s case is not an isolated incident. His arrest underscores growing concerns about the security of taxpayer-funded research and the threat of potential espionage at U.S. institutions.

⁵ Abigail Dye, *Ex-MD Anderson Scientist Accused of Stealing Trade Secrets for China*, FOX 26 HOUSTON (Aug. 25, 2025), <https://www.fox26houston.com/news/ex-md-anderson-cancer-center-researcher-accused-trying-steal-trade-secrets>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ The CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-167 (2022) (codified at 15 U.S.C. § 4651 note).

⁹ *Presidential Memorandum on United States Government-Supported Research and Development National Security Policy* (National Security Presidential Memorandum 33, Jan. 14, 2021).

¹⁰ *NIH Awards by Location & Organization*, U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. (last accessed Sep. 3, 2025), <https://report.nih.gov/award/index.cfm?distr=&fm=&fy=2024&ic=&om=n&orgid=578407&ot=&pid=&rfa=&state=TX&view=state&utm>.

¹¹ 15 C.F.R. Parts 730–774; 50 U.S.C. §§ 4801–4852; 22 C.F.R. Parts 120–130; 22 U.S.C. §§ 2751–2799aa-2.

¹² *NIH Grants Policy Statement*, Section 2.5.1

¹³ Memorandum to the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition (Mar. 20, 2019), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dcRGjmdvbyaftDT4hUDMrtq7RsCODenK/view>.

Similar cases, including an attempt by a University of Michigan researcher to smuggle biohazardous material from China into a lab and an attempt by Harvard researchers to transport proprietary biological material back to China, highlight systemic vulnerabilities across American research institutions.¹⁴ As MD Anderson Cancer Center stands at the forefront of cancer research, protecting the integrity and security of its breakthroughs is critical, not only for patients who depend on them but also for taxpayer trust and national security. To assess the effectiveness of the Center's safeguards and compliance with federal research security laws, we ask that you respond to the following questions in numbered order, by October 2, 2025.

1. Was the Center aware of Dr. Li's receipt of funding from the National Natural Science Foundation of China?
 - a. If so, did the Center take any preventative measures to ensure that the Natural Science Foundation would not influence his work and handling of sensitive information?
2. Was the Center aware of Dr. Li's work on behalf of the First Affiliated Hospital of Chongqing Medical University?
 - a. If so, did the Center take any preventative measures to ensure that the First Affiliated Hospital would not influence his work at the Center and the handling of sensitive information?
3. What vetting procedures does the Center take before extending employment to a foreign researcher?
 - a. Did the Center certify that Dr. Li was not engaged in a "malign foreign talent recruitment program," as required by the CHIPS and Science Act?
4. Are there any other researchers at the Center who are affiliated with these or similar institutions based in China?
5. Did Dr. Li disclose these affiliations on grant applications to NIH?
6. Did Dr. Li disclose these affiliations on grant applications to DoD?

¹⁴ *Securing American Agriculture: Chairmen Babin, Moolenaar, and Walberg Seek Answers to CCP-Linked Bioagent Smuggling*, U.S. H. COMM. ON SCI., SPACE, & TECH. PRESS RELEASES (Jun. 23, 2025), <https://science.house.gov/press-releases?ID=2644969C-F9A8-4013-8BB7-51084E002DF7>; *Harvard University Professor and Two Chinese Nationals Charged in Three Separate China Related Cases*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE PRESS RELEASE (Jan. 28, 2020), <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/harvard-university-professor-and-two-chinese-nationals-charged-three-separate-china-related>.

7. What measures does the Center have in place to ensure the veracity of self-reported foreign affiliation disclosures in grant applications to federal agencies?
 - a. Does the Center have mechanisms in place to ensure that these disclosures are continuously updated?
8. What research cybersecurity measures does the Center have in place as required under NSPM-33?
 - a. How often are these measures reviewed for efficacy and compliance?
9. What foreign travel security measures does the Center have in place as required under NSPM-33?
 - a. How often are these measures reviewed for efficacy and compliance?
10. What export control measures does the Center have in place as required under NSPM-33?
 - a. How often are these measures reviewed for efficacy and compliance?
11. Does the Center have a Technology Control Plan?
 - a. If so, please provide a copy of the plan and the date it was implemented as well as any changes, edits, or updates after Dr. Li's association with MD Anderson.
12. Did Dr. Li attend research security training during his employment with the Center?
 - a. In what format are these trainings (i.e., in-person, video, written, etc.)?
 - b. When was this training conducted?
13. What immediate changes to institutional research security policy has the Center undertaken since July 2025?

Please respond to these questions by October 2, 2025. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to working collaboratively to ensure the full efficacy and functionality of the Center's research security protocols. If you have any questions, please contact Caroline Floam of the Committee's majority staff at (202) 225-6371.

Sincerely,



Brian Babin
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology



Rich McCormick
Chairman
Subcommittee on
Investigations and Oversight
Committee on Science, Space,
and Technology

cc: Zoe Lofgren, Ranking Member, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology;
Emelia Sykes, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, Committee on
Science, Space, and Technology