



December 21, 2023

VIA EMAIL DELIVERY

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Chair
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Rodgers:

The enclosed documents are a third production of materials in response to your May 3, 2023, August 9, 2023, and September 28, 2023, letters to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) regarding research. Today's production bears documents in bates range ECNIH000640 to ECNIH001198.

This production contains requested correspondence between Lili Ren and the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) or GenBank in the timeframe from January 1, 2019, to March 15, 2020, as well as associated data files. We have also included, as an accommodation and in the spirit of being helpful to the committee's inquiry, additional correspondence that does not include Lili Ren but involves submissions in which she was a collaborator.

GenBank is the NIH genetic sequence repository that collects, preserves, and provides public access to assembled and annotated nucleotide sequence data from all domains of life. This repository is managed by NCBI, a division of the National Library of Medicine at NIH. GenBank holds sequencing data that are submitted directly to NIH and sequencing data that are mirrored from and managed by collaborating organizations as part of the International Nucleotide Sequence Database Collaboration (INSDC) in which NIH participates. Sequencing data are submitted to GenBank on a voluntary basis by research personnel and laboratory staff at U.S. and international research institutions, public health laboratories, and laboratory sequencing facilities. GenBank has more than 3.8 billion published records encompassing all sources (i.e., both data submitted directly to NIH and mirrored from INSDC collaborators).

Every submission to GenBank undergoes a multi-step quality assurance review to ensure the data submission is complete and meets submission requirements. Verifying the quality of sequencing data submissions is necessary to maintain the integrity of such databases managed by NIH and ensures that users have access to trusted and reliable data. The first quality control review confirms whether a submission is complete per requirements, which includes submitting complete genome annotation and other metadata (e.g., indicating the location of genes and proteins).

As you will note, the first set of correspondence is from January 2019 regarding the publication date of previously submitted sequencing data from an individual named Lili Ren. These data were subsequently published and remain available. That submission, while related to coronaviruses, was unrelated to SARS-CoV-2. On December 28, 2019, Lili Ren made another submission to GenBank, which was incomplete and lacked the necessary information required for publication. Following established quality control processes during which NCBI staff review technical, but not scientific or public health, details, a resubmission request was issued to Lili Ren on December 31, 2019, with notification that if the additional information requested was not provided by January 14, 2020, then the original submission would be removed from the processing queue. NIH never received the additional information requested and notified Lili Ren, via an automated email, that the submission was removed from the processing queue on January 16, 2020. Thus, the sequence was never made publicly available on GenBank. In the interim, another submission to GenBank from a different submitter was received and published on January 12, 2020. That submission published on January 12 provided the genetic sequence for SARS-CoV-2. The sequence published on January 12, 2020, was nearly identical to the sequence that was submitted by Lili Ren.

By producing these documents, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is making an accommodation unique to the facts and circumstances of this particular matter in a good faith effort to assist the Committee in its inquiry. We respectfully request that the Committee not disseminate or otherwise disclose these documents outside of the Committee without prior consultation with HHS. The production of these materials does not waive any applicable privilege. Should you have any questions regarding this document production, please have your staff contact Daria Berstell at daria.berstell@hhs.gov.

Sincerely,



Melanie Anne Egorin, PhD
Assistant Secretary for Legislation

cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member