

May 26, 2010

Attorney General Kenneth T. Cuccinelli, II
Office of the Attorney General
900 East Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Attorney General Cuccinelli,

As scientists and academic leaders living and working in the Commonwealth of Virginia, we strongly urge you to rescind the April 23, 2010 Civil Investigative Demand your office issued to the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia regarding the scientific research of Dr. Michael Mann. The request is unfounded and could undermine the effectiveness of not only climate scientists but also thousands of other Virginia researchers.

Science thrives on rigorous debate and a frank exchange of differing ideas and perspectives. The freedom of scientists to openly disagree and discuss critical scientific topics has brought Virginia and the United States prosperity and global leadership in science. Research shows that scientific discovery is held back when government officials harass scientists¹.

Transparency is important to ensuring that the integrity of scientific research is upheld. Fortunately, there are numerous safeguards within science that root out scientific misconduct. It is entirely appropriate for scientific institutions to review the work of scientists and hold them accountable for their actions. But scientists who face unwarranted legal intimidation will be less able to make new discoveries that can protect our health, safety, and environment.

Scientists in Virginia are working hard to better understand how our climate is changing and how we might best avoid the most devastating consequences of global warming in Virginia and elsewhere. They are searching for cures for diseases, measuring the toxicity of environmental contaminants, and developing new technologies that will keep America strong. If scientists are to be successful in serving the public good, they must have the freedom to explore ideas without fearing that any individual statement or email will be taken out of context.

Virginia's colleges and universities--as well as its private sector--thrive on innovation and have a proud tradition of scientific research and discovery that dates back to the days of Thomas Jefferson. Actions that interfere with the academic freedom of scientists and their ability to challenge the ideas of other scientists threaten this legacy.

In the interests of the people of Virginia, we urge you to halt this burdensome and entirely unwarranted investigation.

cc: Virginia Governor Robert F. McDonnell

¹ Kempner J (2008) "The Chilling Effect: How Do Researchers React to Controversy?" Public Library of Science Medicine 5(11): e222.

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