

*Testimony given September 20, 2007 at a Public Hearing  
held by the National Institutes of Health*

### **Concerning Construction of a Level 4 Bio-containment Lab in Boston**

As an Alderman in Newton, I co-sponsored the resolution opposing the siting of this biolab in Boston. The resolution passed and speaks for itself.

Personally, I believe there is something inherently wrong with siting a level 4 biolab in the middle of a densely populated urban center. Further, it is cynical, if not racist, to locate it in a community of particularly vulnerable, lower-income Black and Hispanic families. I suspect that placing this lab in the gentrified area of the South End would never have been attempted.

I have heard and read about the myriad safety measures that are planned. Frankly, I find it astoundingly arrogant to assume that facility employees and the supposedly “fail-safe” system you expect to install are infallible. There was a fire, a few months ago, in a Boston University medical building that caused the evacuation of hundreds of people in the surrounding area. The fact that it turned out to be non-lethal is beside the point. The point is that human beings are fallible—they make mistakes. And a mistake when dealing with the deadliest pathogens we know, for which we have no antidote, can result in a catastrophe of major proportions. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of people will sicken and die.

I am aware of the politics of this situation. But there must be a time when concern for the wellbeing of its citizens, trumps a city and state’s desire for the financial gain they believe (mistakenly, I think) will accrue. A level 4 lab should not be built at all. But if it is going to be built, it should be located where it will do the least harm in case of the accident that will almost certainly occur at some point in time--

It should not be constructed in the middle of Boston!

Leslie Burg  
Alderman at Large,  
Ward 3, Newton,