



ACE
alternatives for
community &
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Safety Net

Media Release

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City-wide Coalition Rallies for Accountability from Local Officials on Boston University Bio-terror Lab Proposal

[Boston, MA] Today, a city-wide community coalition marched through the South End to oppose Boston University's bid to build a high security bio-terror lab in the neighborhood. The coalition called upon Boston City Councilors, Mayor Menino, and Governor Romney to demand that BU answer to community concerns. BU has so far refused to make public the details of their proposal. This action comes as the federal government is expected to decide before the end of the month who will receive grants to build biodefense laboratories.

The coalition includes Safety Net and Alternatives for Community & Environment from Roxbury, other groups from the Fenway, South End, South Boston, and Chinatown, Council for Responsible Genetics, and Boston University Germ-Bioterror Lab Opposition Coalition (BUGBLOC). The coalition has been opposed to the proposed lab because of concerns over health and safety risks, lack of economic and community benefits, and lack of public accountability and oversight.

BU is a finalist in competing for federal research and construction funds that could amount to \$1.6 billion in the coming years. There are currently only five Biosafety Level 4 (BL4) labs in the US. These are the highest security research labs that study the most dangerous biological weapons agents, including anthrax, smallpox, and the plague. If successful, the BU proposal would be the first such lab to be sited in the heart of an urban neighborhood.

At the rally, activists demanded that the City's elected officials step up to answer community concerns. Though the coalition has the support of City Councilors Chuck Turner, Felix Arroyo, and Maura Hennigan, the Mayor, Governor, City Council President Michael Flaherty are on record in support of BU's proposal.

Lucky Devlin, South Boston resident, said "Our elected officials need to ask more questions of BU before giving the green light to this project. This lab could be a threat to all of our

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neighborhoods and affects the entire city. We're the ones who will have to live with the consequences."

Shena Carvajal, a Fenway resident and host of "Continente" on Cuncavision (WECA), said "Democracy means the people rule, if we are to consider that we are in a democracy. Given the conditions that surround this issue, we cannot call it democratic."

Earlier this summer, coalition members discovered that the City of Boston paid more than \$1.2 million for two state-owned parcels of land necessary to build a parking garage for the bio-terror lab and is giving the land to Boston University.

Donovan Walker, Co-Chair of the Safety Net, said "The Governor and Mayor are subsidizing BU by giving them the land they need for the lab. But BU's refused to give us the information we need to assess the costs and benefits of this lab. We demand accountability from BU, the Mayor, and the Governor."

Coalition members also doubt claims by BU that the facility will generate significant job opportunities for local residents. According to a 1991 report, only 5% of bio-medical research-related jobs are open to those with only a high school diploma and no prior experience. ("Boston: A Biomedical Frontier, Hype or Hope?" by Eswaran Selvarajah, South End Neighborhood Action Program of ABCD, November 26, 1991). The security perimeter required for the facility will further limit commercial development at the site (e.g. retail, office, childcare, hotel) that might bring more jobs for area residents.

ACE is a Roxbury-based environmental justice group working to build the power of lower income communities and communities of color to promote healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities (www.ace-ej.org). Safety Net, an organizing project of ACE, brings together Roxbury residents to advocate for sustainable and equitable development.

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