



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON **SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

Opening Statement

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Ranking Member Emilia Sykes (D-OH)

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:

*“Safeguarding Federal Research Funds:
The False Claims Act’s Role in Combating Grant Fraud”*

June 24, 2026

Thank you, Chairman McCormick, for holding this hearing. It is certainly an interesting time to be talking about fraud in this country. We’ll get back to that in a minute.

I’m a lawyer by training. I always enjoy a good legal discussion. But it does strike me as odd that we are holding an oversight hearing about the Department of Justice. We have a broad jurisdiction on this Committee, but it stops well short of overseeing DOJ’s use of statutory authority to investigate fraudulent claims. This is yet another example of a pattern that we’ve seen throughout the 119th Congress. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle seem eager to talk about anything other than what the Trump Administration is actually doing to American science.

It’s not hard to understand why.

Since January 2025, the administration’s attacks on scientists, scientific institutions, and scientific agencies have sent American science into a tailspin that keeps getting worse. Billions of dollars of research awards have been terminated. Science agencies have been gutted. Political appointees throughout the government interfere with merit-based processes at will, something that the White House now wants to formalize through a new regulation. Merit-based, peer reviewed research supported by the federal government helps us understand our world. It also creates a very real economic impact. In Ohio, \$20 million in NASA Science funding generates more than \$56 million in economic impact. NSF invested \$2.83 million in my district in 2025. This funding supports not just research, but workforce development in growing sectors like the polymer industry.

So when the Administration decides they want to politicize a merit-based system to advance research only when it suits them, they aren’t just messing with research, they’re messing with our economy and good-paying jobs for people in my district.

These are the issues that this Oversight Subcommittee should be focusing on. But that kind of oversight would require my Majority colleagues to take an honest look at what Donald Trump has done, something they seem too afraid to do. So instead, we have a hearing to discuss fraud.

Good. Let's talk about fraud.

I think trying to create a \$1.8 billion slush fund to make payments to the president's friends and allies is a fraud against the public. I think shifting \$352 million from the Secret Service to help build the president's fancy new ballroom is a fraud against the taxpayer. I think failing to comply with the Epstein Files Transparency Act and redacting material to protect abusers, not survivors, is fraud against the public. I think fabricating a made-up legal settlement to shield the president from being audited is a fraud against the hardworking people of my district, Ohio's 13th district, who do things honestly and expect the same integrity from their leaders.

The idea that this administration is genuinely concerned about fraud is laughable. The political appointees in this administration, and this Department of Justice, will defend, justify, and rationalize any fraud if the president orders them to.

And I want to be clear. Grant fraud and research misconduct are unacceptable and must be taken seriously. It should remain a priority for the federal government to root them out, and the False Claims Act can be an important tool for that purpose.

But the problem we will confront here today is the same problem we encounter over and over again under this president: the Trump Administration cannot be trusted to use even the legitimate tools at their disposal without abusing them for their own improper ends. To me, fraud means actual fraud: improper charges, misused funds, falsified documents. But to this DOJ, fraud appears to be a fig leaf to cover up an ideological crackdown on ideas and beliefs they don't support.

Over the past year, DOJ has started to wield the False Claims Act against federal contractors and grant awardees in novel, unprecedented ways. DOJ now argues that the act of promoting diversity is itself a form of discrimination, and that these activities can be investigated and punished using the False Claims Act.

Ms. Jenny, you have been at the forefront of that effort. I look forward to questioning you about this dubious interpretation of the law, and whether it is another tool in the campaign of harassment and retribution the administration has been waging against its enemies. I expect to get answers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.