



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:

*“Balancing Biotechnology Innovation and Biosecurity:
Securing U.S. Leadership in a Global Race”*

September 16, 2026

Thank you, Chairman McCormick, for holding this hearing. These are very important topics, and I look forward to a discussion that treats them with the nuance and complexity they deserve.

Biotechnology is an incredibly exciting field of scientific research with immense potential to solve some of our biggest problems. From manufacturing to medical treatments to crop resilience, biotech innovation is racing ahead and generating advances at an astounding rate.

America’s leadership in biotechnology has brought enormous benefits to our economy and our society in recent decades. Recent estimates suggest that the U.S. biotech sector supports over 600,000 jobs and contributes over \$200 billion annually to our national GDP. Biotech innovation is no less vital for American competitiveness in emerging technologies. The cutting-edge breakthroughs developed in the biotechnology sector position our nation at the forefront of the next generation of scientific discoveries.

In my district, Ohio’s 13th Congressional District, the biotech sector has grown rapidly in recent years. In 2024, I announced \$51 million in federal investments for the Akron Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub through the federal Tech Hubs program. Biotechnology now supports tens of thousands of high-paying jobs in Ohio, many of them concentrated in the Cleveland-Akron region at leading institutions such as the University of Akron. A recent survey found that Ohio’s Life Sciences industry employed nearly 65,000 people, earning average annual wages exceeding six figures. Biotechnology is an engine of growth for our local economy and offers tremendous opportunities for working families in our region.

But America’s leadership in biotechnology is not a given. There is no question that China has made enormous strides in developing its own biotech sector in recent decades. To compete with China, we need to invest in biotechnology with smart policies and a wise approach. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has done the opposite.

In May 2025, President Trump issued an Executive Order that claimed to end federal funding for “Dangerous Gain-of-Function Research.” But the EO was so broad, so sweeping, so vague and poorly written, that it had a chilling effect on biotechnology research around the country.

I want to be clear: biosecurity is a serious issue, and of course we must ensure that biotechnology research is conducted in a way that is safe, secure, and responsibly minimizes risk and potential harm to society. Nobody disputes that we need well-crafted safeguards to govern so-called “Gain of Function” research when it has a genuine risk of harm – least of all the scientific community itself, which understands the need for proper safety protocols, clear transparency, and strong ethical guardrails.

But instead of being smart, the administration has embraced a rigid, black and white policy that threatens to undermine our innovation economy while impeding our ability to address infectious disease threats and respond to future pandemic outbreaks. Scientists, universities, professional societies, even federal agencies have struggled to make sense of an ambiguous definition of “dangerous Gain-of-Function” research. As a result, whole fields of science have been gripped with fear that longstanding research might unwittingly run afoul of new federal restrictions.

Their fears are not unfounded.

In the summer of 2025, the administration terminated dozens of research grants allegedly due to “Gain of Function” concerns – including grants in fields such as tuberculosis research that had no plausible connection to any kind of safety risk. In July 2026, the administration issued a new policy to carry out the Executive Order. But “Gain-of-Function” remains so ill-defined in the policy that researchers continue to be mystified about whether their own research might be classified as “potential” or “dangerous Gain-of-Function”.

The definitions are broad, the penalty for violation is high, and researchers continue to fear the personal and professional consequences that could result if President Trump targets their work. The only thing that *is* clear about the Trump Administration’s approach is that it badly needs guidance from the actual scientists, the actual experts, who understand biotechnology and understand how to prudently oversee it.

More than anything, that is what has been missing from this recent debate: the voices of the scientific community, who can help guide us to a culture of biosecurity that allows biotech innovation to safely thrive, rather than a lockdown mentality that impedes biotech innovation and cedes American leadership in crucial fields of research to China.

That is one thing I hope to rectify today. Dr. Gigi Gronvall is a leading scientific expert on these topics, and I am grateful for her willingness to testify before the Subcommittee. I believe we will all benefit from her expertise and her perspective.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.