

## **Call to Action: Ethics, Health Protection & Advocacy for Foster Children**

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As medical professionals, our intention to advocate improvement of health status of human populations innately includes accepting the challenge of protecting the health of the most vulnerable among us. There currently exists what may be the single most important stance we must take to protect one of the most vulnerable populations in our country—foster children. NBC News recently published, “Government tested AIDS Drugs on Foster Kids,” (Please see <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7736157/ns/health-aids/t/government-tested-aids-drugs-foster-kids/#.Uin3SdKsjck>) detailing research studies completed in the late 1990s by National Institutes of Health grantees to test AZT on sero-positive foster children diagnosed with HIV in Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Colorado and Texas. While these tests availed children to treatments that they would not otherwise have access, 90% of these tests were completed without mandatory advocates to explain research protocols to foster parents or monitor participant reactions to treatments. In these studies, foster children were not provided the same ethical protections as other children in terms of requisite informed consent by parent(s), although existing federal legislation specifically details otherwise for children who are wards of the State participating in health research. Health professionals and concerned citizens must mobilize now to inform federal funding sources like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and US Federal Drug Administration (FDA) that this mistreatment cannot continue.

Contact Dr. Francis S. Collins, MD, PhD, Director of the National Institutes of Health ([francis.collins@nih.gov](mailto:francis.collins@nih.gov)), and Dr. Margaret A. Hamburg, Commissioner of the US Federal Drug Administration ([margaret.hamburg@fda.hhs.gov](mailto:margaret.hamburg@fda.hhs.gov)) to show your concern and urge greater oversight of research protocols targeting foster children, and punitive actions for federal grantees that do not adhere to federal legislation requiring advocates for each child participating in research. Refer to 45 CFR Part 46, *Subpart D*, §46.409.

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