

November 8, 2004

The Honourable Greg Sorbara
Minister of Finance
Government of Ontario
Frost Building South, 7th Floor
7 Queen's Park Crescent
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y7

Dear Minister Sorbara

We are writing to the Premier and to you, as Minister of Finance, for assurance that a program of dubious public value be reviewed before more tax dollars are assigned to it.

Specifically, we wrote to Mr. Cordiano, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, on August 12, 2004 but have yet to receive a reply concerning a \$3.6 million grant for rabies research infrastructure that relies on matching funds from Ontario taxpayers through the program replacing the Ontario Innovation Trust.

The millions of dollars being sought for infrastructure on behalf of rabies research will mean the entrenchment of even more on-going operational costs for programs that simply do not reflect pressing public priorities. The project has been marketed as a "regional economic development" driver for the City of Peterborough.

However, the benefits going to Peterborough are restricted to a handful of researchers at the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Trent University along with a few private sector vaccine-bait manufacturers. This expenditure will come at a very high cost to Ontario taxpayers who will continue to be on the hook each year for unwarranted and hugely expensive rabies control programs.

In less than four years, a collaborative research project between the OMNR and Trent has managed to garner almost \$6 million in public funds for the study of a disease that ranks as the lowest public health risk in North America. This does not include an additional \$25 million or more spent during this same period by the Ontario and federal governments for rabies control and testing programs.

It is important to note that the recipient who was awarded the research grants also sits as a member of the selection committee on one of the granting agencies. This raises conflict of interest concerns and calls into question the lack of public scrutiny in how tax dollars are spent. The relationship between the researcher and the granting agency is particularly important because such a low public policy priority received a large number of grant allocations in just a few years.

These funds were directed at a time when Ontarians are very much affected by the critical shortfall in government funding for basic health care needs. Wait times for cardiac, cancer and cataract care, as well as hip and knee replacements and MRI and CT scans are causing untold human suffering, significant economic consequences due to loss of income and, undoubtedly, deaths that were preventable.

Yet, your government continues to allocate millions of dollars annually to a virtually non-existent human-risk disease such as rabies. The rabies program has been advanced on the basis of outlandish and unsupportable fear-mongering that is, in fact, contemptuous of the public's intelligence by a small but determined faction motivated by self interest.

It is unconscionable that further funding such as the request submitted to the Ontario Innovation Trust or its successor be considered. We ask for your assurance, as Minister of Finance, to intervene in two key areas:

1. To direct the Ontario Innovation Trust to end its allocation for the rabies research programme; and
2. To make clear to the Trust that the government will not provide any matching fundings.

Sincerely

Liz White, Spokesperson
Ontario Wildlife Coalition

Donna DuBreuil, President
Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

c.c. Premier Dalton McGuinty

Hon. Joe Cordiano,	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Mr. Richard Patten,	Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Tim McTiernan,	ADM, Economic Development & Trade