

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

I write to bring to your attention a potentially troubling issue and possible conflict-of-interest with a multi-million-dollar award recipient from the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) research program.

A review of federal funding records shows that a company, barely in existence, which never previously received direct National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding, was awarded \$28 million last fall by the Biden Administration as part of the new ARPA-H research program. The company receiving the \$28 million in taxpayer funds appears to have a newly installed top executive, who recently was employed as a Biden Administration political appointee and is also a former HHS employee. Furthermore, the company taking in \$28 million lists only a post office box in Maryland as its business address on public funding records posted on USAspending.gov.

How does a company barely in existence, headed by a recent political appointee, use a post office box as an address and get a \$28 million check from NIH's ARPA-H program, reportedly to work on vaccines?

I originally planned to ask President Biden's ARPA-H director about this award, but she recently, and understandably, was fired by the Trump Administration.¹ It's troubling that ARPA-H is in its infancy and already has potentially questionable funding recipients.

BACKGROUND:

In 2022, in the omnibus appropriations bill, Congress appropriated an initial \$1 billion to ARPA-H, a new and unauthorized program within HHS. President Biden's HHS Secretary subsequently moved ARPA-H into the NIH.² The program received an additional \$1.5 billion in appropriations

¹ "ARPA-H Director Fired by Trump Administration," Feb. 14, 2025, American Institute of Physics, McKenzie, L, <https://ww2.aip.org/fyi/arpa-h-director-fired-by-trump-administration>.

² Public Law 117-103, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47074>; From page 1312-1324 of a 1,653-page Omnibus appropriations bill (H.R. 2617), ARPA-H was given another \$1.5 billion in appropriations (FY2023) and

in the FY2023 funding bill, and its 22-page authorizing legislation was dropped into that bill, without debate or discussion, despite its multi-billion-dollar tab for U.S. taxpayers. The program received an additional \$1.5 billion in FY2024 appropriations, bringing its taxpayer funding to \$4 billion in three years.³ In September 2024, ARPA-H announced a new round of program awards, and one of the recipients is Vaccine Company, Inc.⁴

SENDING \$28 MILLION TO A POST OFFICE ADDRESS?

Vaccine Company, Inc. is purported to be working on a Zika vaccine, among other things, yet it **lists a U.S. Post Office in Maryland as its business address on federal records listed on USAspending.gov.**

Federal funding records related to Vaccine Company, Inc. (ARPA-H Award # AY2AX000054), show its address to be “10421 Motor City Dr. Westlake #34416 Bethesda, Maryland.”⁵

A simple search of this address shows that it is a United States Post Office. The Westlake Post Office confirmed that the #34416 “address” for the Vaccine Company, Inc., is a post-office box located within the post office.⁶



Secretary Kennedy, are U.S. taxpayers sending \$28 million for research to a post office box?

POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST: ARPA-H AWARD RECIPIENT COMPANY APPEARS TO BE LED BY FORMER WHITE HOUSE AND HHS STAFFER

Mr. Secretary, I’m concerned that ARPA-H’s Director Wegrzyn sent \$28 million to a brand-new company with ever-changing executives and a murky past.

From federal funding records, it does not appear the Vaccine Company, Inc. received any previous ARPA-H or direct NIH awards.⁷

was authorized at \$2.5 billion over five years (2024-2028), <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ328/PLAW-117publ328.pdf>; <https://arpa-h.gov/about/timeline>; <https://irp.nih.gov/catalyst/30/4/arpa-h-established-within-nih>.

³ FY2025 ARPA-H Congressional Justification for Appropriations Committees, <https://arpa-h.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/ARPA-H%20FY%202025.pdf>.

⁴ “Teams pursuing broadly effective vaccine candidates are led by: La Jolla Institute for Immunology focusing on beta and gamma-herpesvirus antigen and vaccine candidate development, including cytomegalovirus infections. University of Washington focusing on alpha and gamma-herpesvirus antigen and vaccine candidate development, including herpes simplex virus infections. Vaccine Company, Inc. focusing on vaccine development for flaviviruses, which include threats such as West Nile virus, dengue virus, and Zika virus. Vanderbilt University focusing on antigen design and vaccine candidate development against alphaviruses, such as Chikungunya virus and Eastern equine encephalitis virus,” September 25, 2024, <https://arpa-h.gov/news-and-events/arpa-h-announces-awards-develop-computational-platform-multi-virus-vaccine-design>.

⁵ https://tags.hhs.gov/Detail/RecipDetail?arg_EntityId=7y%2B9Z%2BsV7KKhOG2qnYwO0Q%3D%3D.

⁶ In response to a telephone inquiry from the office of Sen. Ernst on February 20, 2025, the operator at Westlake’s U.S. Post Office confirmed that this address is a post office box, <https://tools.usps.com/locations/details/1434473>.

⁷ https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_AY2AX000054_7529;

https://reporter.nih.gov/search/hyuvnsEbiUW6_HlzZzgrpA/projects; An abstract from a \$1+ million, 2023 NIAID

The State of Maryland shows several records pertaining to Vaccine Company, Inc, which include that it failed to file a property return in 2023 and therefore forfeited its Maryland registration.⁸

- **2022:** Vaccine Company, Inc. filed paperwork multiple times for Foreign Corporation Qualification with the State of Maryland, listing the same post office address as the address listed in its federal ARPA-H award file.⁹ A 2022 filing indicates the company’s “President or Vice President” is Jay Markowitz.¹⁰
- **2023:** A little over one year later, on the company’s July 2023 Foreign Corporation Qualification Maryland paperwork, the company’s “President or Vice President” is listed as Sonya Bernstein, a woman who shares a name with that of a former Biden Administration COVID-response team staffer also named Sonya Bernstein.¹¹
- Though public records on this new Vaccine Company, Inc., are not easy to locate, just months before Sonya Bernstein is named as a top executive in *Maryland* paperwork, a January 2023 *California* filing lists the company’s Chief Executive Officer as John Merkels, with the post office box in Maryland listed as his address, while Juha Lauren is listed as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), with the Maryland post office box address listed for him, as well.¹²
- **2024:** A June 14, 2024, California Secretary of State filing shows the Vaccine Company, Inc. listing Sonya Bernstein as its “Chief Financial Officer,” the second CFO in less than two years. The California filing also lists the Maryland post office as the company’s mailing address, though it is unclear why Vaccine Company, Inc.’s 2023 Maryland filing lists the former Biden staffer as the “President or Vice President,” while a California filing shows a different executive in charge, and lists Ms. Bernstein as the CFO in 2024.¹³

biodefense and related countermeasures grant says, “**Vaccine Company Inc., a newly formed company** that is committed to the rapid development and deployment of vaccines for global use, will provide consultation and overall strategic guidance for the ultimate expedient deployment of these vaccines” (emphasis added), <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/ckZDA-k8AECMcNKf79-uBA/project-details/10704845>.

⁸ The State of Maryland website reports, “THE ENTITY WAS FORFEITED FOR FAILURE TO FILE PROPERTY RETURN FOR 2023” (all caps in original).

⁹ https://taggs.hhs.gov/Detail/RecipDetail?arg_EntityId=7y%2B9Z%2BsV7KKhOG2qnYwO0Q%3D%3D; <https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch/Business>.

¹⁰ “Foreign Corporation Qualification”, <https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch/Business>; filed June 15, 2022, “Jay Markowitz” on line over “Signature of President or Vice President[.]”

¹¹ Sonya Bernstein was featured in a June 3, 2021 *Politico* article <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/west-wing-playbook/2021/06/03/meet-bidens-covid-wunderkind-493109>;

<https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch/Business>, “Vaccine Company, Inc.” search, Department ID Number: F23013014, Foreign Corporation Qualification, filing date July 30, 2024, signed by Sonya Bernstein July 12, 2024, above “(Original signature of President or Vice President)[.]”

¹² <https://bizfileonline.sos.ca.gov/search/business>, “Vaccine Company, Inc.” search, State of California, Statement of Information Corporation, File No: BA20230124502, Date Filed January 23, 2023.

¹³ <https://bizfileonline.sos.ca.gov/search/business>, “Vaccine Company, Inc.” search, File No: BA20241135747, Filed June 14, 2024.

It's hard to follow, but it appears there was an ever-changing list of executives at a company just before it got a multi-million-dollar taxpayer award from the Biden Administration's NIH.

In addition to being a former political appointee, Ms. Bernstein also appears to have held a three-year position inside HHS, according to her public LinkedIn profile.¹⁴ While former Biden Administration political appointees and HHS employees are free to form or purchase companies, **this rapid transition from staffer to multi-million-dollar-NIH APRA-H grant recipient seems extraordinary and unusual.**

It also appears the Vaccine Company, Inc. got its paperwork in order just in the nick of time to get a \$28 million award from the Biden Administration. State of Maryland records show that after forfeiting its Maryland registration, Vaccine Company, Inc. had its Maryland registration reinstated in 2024, just before its \$28 million award was announced by ARPA-H.¹⁵

- Secretary Kennedy, how was this company vetted to receive such a large, taxpayer-funded award and is it a conflict of interest that this company, seemingly run, in part, by a former Biden Administration official, secured an ARPA-H multi-million-dollar award during the Biden Administration?

According to the ARPA-H press announcement, Vaccine Company, Inc. will be “focusing on vaccine development for flaviviruses, which include threats such as West Nile virus, dengue virus, and Zika virus.” The company's funding records include the following description: “Project A-FAVE: Applied biotechnology for broad Flavivirus Antigen discovery and Vaccine candidate evaluation[.]”

Tracking details in the Vaccine Company, Inc.'s California filing, and comparing that to realtor floor plans found online, it appears the company might have use of a laboratory in San Francisco.¹⁶ If true, why then would the \$28 million taxpayer award be sent to a Maryland post office box, instead of to the California laboratory?

Vaccine research is serious business and West Nile, dengue, and Zika are serious viruses.

- Mr. Secretary, please provide details explaining where Vaccine Company, Inc. is physically located and how and where it plans to spend \$28 million taxpayer dollars doing vaccine research.

Current records indicate \$2 million of its \$28.2 million ARPA-H award has been spent.¹⁷ I would encourage you to look into clawing back the remaining funds, and seeking reimbursement for the spent funds, if in fact this ARPA-H payment to a newly established biotech start-up, run by a recent Biden political appointee, was improperly awarded.

¹⁴ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sonyabernstein>.

¹⁵ <https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch/Business>.

¹⁶ <https://bizfileonline.sos.ca.gov/search/business>; See 4th Floor Floor Plan, page 5 of 8,


<https://www.cbre.com/resources/fileassets/US-SMPL-98092/4ce8e3e4/b2d754ef-9e5a-4187-aa74-f2aa266628ad.pdf>

¹⁷ https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_AY2AX000054_7529, as of March 4, 2025.

Mr. Secretary, please share all documents related to this ARPA-H award recipient, including the submitted proposal, and any additional information regarding this multi-million-dollar award. Please provide the names and positions of the ARPA-H and HHS officials who signed off on this award. Please provide these documents and answers as soon as possible, but by Monday, March 17, 2025, at the latest.

Thank you for your time and attention to this request. If you have questions, please contact me or my staff, at (202) 224-3254.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

cc: Andrew Kilianski, ARPA-H Program Manager

Attached: Two pages of additional information

AWARD PROFILE
Direct Payment Summary



Direct Payment for Specified Use FAIN AY2AX000054

In Progress (4 years, 6 months remain)

<p>Awarding Agency Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)</p>	<p>Recipient VACCINE COMPANY INC 10421 MOTOR CITY DR WESTLAKE #34416 BETHESDA, MD 20817-9996 UNITED STATES Congressional District: MD-08</p>	<p>Assistance Listings (CFDA Programs) 93.394 - ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY FOR HEALTH (ARPA-H) VIEW MORE INFO ABOUT THIS PROGRAM</p>	<p>Dates</p> <p>Today</p> <p>Start Date: Sep 21, 2024 End Date: Sep 20, 2029</p>
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S Award Amounts Description



PROJECT A-FAVE: APPLIED BIOTECHNOLOGY FOR BROAD FLAVIVIRUS ANTIGEN DISCOVERY AND VACCINE CANDIDATE EVALUATION

Outlayed Amount	\$1,978,996.71
Obligated Amount	\$28,179,321.00
Non-Federal Funding	\$0.00
Total Funding	\$28,179,321.00

USPS
https://tools.usps.com/locations/details

WESTLAKE
WESTLAKE, 10421 MOTOR CITY DR, BETHESDA, MD 20817-9996, POTOMAC, 10221 RIVER RD, POTOMAC, MD 20854-9998, ROCKVILLE, 500 N WASHINGTON ST, ROCKVILLE, MD 20850-...
Missing: #34416

postofficehours.us
https://postofficehours.us/maryland/Bethesda

Westlake Carrier Annex - Bethesda - postofficehours.us
10421 MOTOR CITY DR 20817, BETHESDA, Maryland. Check post offices nearby. Share. Hours of operation. Phone # for contact: Collection hours (Last).
Missing: #34416 20817-9996

HHS TAGGS (.gov)
https://taggs.hhs.gov/Detail/RecipDetail

vaccine company inc
VACCINE COMPANY INC - Address: 10421 MOTOR CITY DR WESTLAKE #34416 BETHESDA, MD 20817-9996 - County: MONTGOMERY - Country: UNITED STATES - UEI: G54UH3CU4M4 - DUNS ...

<https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch/Business>

MARYLAND BUSINESS EXPRESS

Business Home

VACCINE COMPANY, INC.: F23013014

Notice
Effective Friday, Nov. 1st, 2024, the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation will no longer accept Electronic Checks (ACH) payments for online services. Please utilize a credit card, debit card, or PayPal for payment. Thank you.
Please be advised that business filings do not require additional representation and can be completed by the business owner. Fully vet any unsolicited requests for payment for services such as those listed below.
1. Solicitors who are not affiliated with SDAT are instructing newly registered businesses to send additional payment in order to obtain a Certificate of Status. Any 3rd party solicitation from a company attempting to represent the Maryland Secretary of State or SDAT via mail or email should be fully vetted before submitting additional payment.
2. Solicitors who are not affiliated with SDAT are sending instructions to businesses entitled Annual Report Notice, in which they are asked to send \$400 to file an Annual Report through a third party service called "Business Services". This notice is not affiliated with SDAT. You may report the letter to the Maryland Secretary of State, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov, or the United States Postal Inspection Service at www.usps.gov or 1-877-476-2455.

General Information **Filing History** Annual Report/Personal Property

Filing History

The items listed below are associated with this business.
- Click to view/print PDF (note: some items may not be available to view)
- Click to view comment associated with this item

Item	Date/Time Filed	Firm	Folio	Pages
RE-QUALIFICATION	7/30/2024 9:00:00 AM			2
DEPT. ACTION - FORFEITURE	11/13/2023 9:06:00 PM			
QUALIFICATION	6/15/2022 1:41:00 PM			2

LinkedIn

Sonya Bernstein
The White House
University of Pennsylvania

Washington, District of Columbia, United States
Contact Info
1K followers - 500+ connections
See your mutual connections

Join to view profile Message

Activity

Today I joined many of my colleagues in resigning from the former US Digital Service, now the US DOGE Service, and together we released the statement...
Liked by Sonya Bernstein

Munger, Tolles & Olson is pleased to announce the return of Jeremy Kreisberg to the firm as of counsel in its Washington, D.C. office. Jeremy brings...
Liked by Sonya Bernstein

I am grateful to let everyone know that I am joining Brown University School of Public Health as a distinguished senior fellow. Thank you for this...
Liked by Sonya Bernstein

Join now to see all activity

Experience

Senior Advisor, COVID-19 Response Team
The White House
2021 - 2022 - 1 year

COVID-19 Response
Biden-Harris Transition Team
2020 - 2021 - 1 year

Assistant Vice President, Senior Director
NYC Health + Hospitals
2018 - 2020 - 2 years

Assistant Secretary for Health & Economic Policy
The State of New York
2017 - 2018 - 1 year
Greater New York City Area

Deputy Chief of Staff, Special Advisor to the Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
2014 - 2017 - 3 years
Washington D.C. Metro Area

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sonyabernstein>

Delaware
The First State

Page 1

I, JEFFREY W. BULLOCK, SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE, DO HEREBY CERTIFY "VACCINE COMPANY, INC." IS DULY INCORPORATED UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE AND IS IN GOOD STANDING AND HAS A LEGAL CORPORATE EXISTENCE SO FAR AS THE RECORDS OF THIS OFFICE SHOW, AS OF THE NINTH DAY OF JUNE, A.D. 2022. AND I DO HEREBY FURTHER CERTIFY THAT THE SAID "VACCINE COMPANY, INC." WAS INCORPORATED ON THE TWENTY-FIRST DAY OF MARCH, A.D. 2022. AND I DO HEREBY FURTHER CERTIFY THAT THE ANNUAL FRANCHISE TAXES HAVE BEEN ASSESSED TO DATE.



JWB
Jeffrey W. Bullock, Secretary of State

6586803 8300
SR# 20222678350
You may verify this certificate online at corp.delaware.gov/authver.shtml

Authentication: 203641429
Date: 06-09-22



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Office of the Secretary of State
STATEMENT OF INFORMATION
CORPORATION
California Secretary of State
1500 11th Street
Sacramento, California 95814
(916) 653-3516

For Office Use Only

-FILED-

File No.: BA20230124502
Date Filed: 1/23/2023

Entity Details
Corporation Name: Vaccine Company, Inc.
Entity No.: 5113053
Formed In: DELAWARE
Principal Address: 8755 W HIGGINS RD #1025 CHICAGO, IL 60631
Mailing Address: PO BOX 34416 BETHESDA, MD 20827
Officers:
John Markels, Chief Executive Officer
Eric Jensen, Secretary
Juha Lauren, Chief Financial Officer
Additional Officers: None Entered
Agent for Service of Process: CORPORATION SERVICE COMPANY WHICH WILL DO BUSINESS IN CALIFORNIA AS CSC - LAWYERS INCORPORATING SERV Registered Corporate 1505 Agent
Type of Business: Biotechnology
Email Notifications: Yes, I opt-in to receive entity notifications via email.

Page 1 of 2

Electronic Signature
By signing, I affirm that the information herein is true and correct and that I am authorized by California law to sign.

John Markels
Signature Date: 01/23/2023

Filing Date and Time: 6/15/2022 1:41:44 PM

Acknowledgment Number: 500000006827520

FOREIGN CORPORATION QUALIFICATION

This document must be accompanied by written proof of existence from the home state, equivalent of a Certificate of Good Standing.

The undersigned Corporation for the purpose of qualifying pursuant to the provisions of Title 7 of the Corporations and Associations Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, to do intrastate, interstate and foreign business as a foreign Corporation in the State of Maryland, hereby certifies to the State Department of Assessments and Taxation:

(A) That the name of the Corporation is: Vaccine Company, Inc. (F23013014)

(B) The corporation was formed in the State of: Delaware

(C) That the address of the Corporation is: 8755 W Higgins Rd #1025, Chicago, IL, 60631

In order to operate in Maryland, will the registering entity require a business or industry license that is issued by the state or any other local agency? Uncertain

(D) That the name of the resident agent of the corporation in Maryland is: CSC-Lawyers Incorporating Service Company
whose address is: 7 St. Paul Street, Suite 820, Baltimore, MD, 21202

(Every Foreign Corporation qualified in Maryland is required to name a Maryland Agent)

(E) (Optional) That the address of the principal office of the Corporation in Maryland is:

(F) That the Corporation (check appropriate response):

(1) has (2) has not done intrastate, interstate or foreign business in this State before qualification or registration as a foreign Corporation or after the qualification or registration was cancelled.

I hereby consent to my designation in this document as resident agent for this corporation.

Jay Markowitz

Signature of President or Vice President

Julie Thompson, Agent

Signature of Resident Agent

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF ASSESSMENTS & TAXATION
SDAT302



301 WEST PRESIDENT STREET, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201-2395

Page 1 of 1

Filing Date and Time: 7/30/2024 9:32:09 AM

Acknowledgment Number: 1000362014614889

Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation
Charter Division
FOREIGN CORPORATION QUALIFICATION

(Filing fee of \$100.00 required)

This document must be accompanied by written proof of existence from the home state dated within the last sixty (60) days, equivalent of a Certificate of Good Standing no more than 60 days old at the time of filing.

The undersigned Corporation for the purpose of qualifying pursuant to the provisions of Title 7 of the Corporations and Associations Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, to do intrastate, interstate and foreign business as a foreign Corporation in the State of Maryland, hereby certifies to the State Department of Assessments and Taxation:

(A) That the name of the Corporation is Vaccine Company, Inc.

(B) The corporation was formed in the State of Delaware

(C) That the address of the Corporation is 10421 Motor City Dr #34416 Westlake, Bethesda, MD 20817

(D) That the name and address of the resident agent of the corporation in Maryland: CSC-Lawyers Incorporating Service Company 7 St. Paul Street, Suite 820, Baltimore, MD 21202
(Every foreign corporation qualified in Maryland is required to name a Maryland agent)

(E) (OPTIONAL) That the address of the principal office of the Corporation in Maryland is:

(F) That the Corporation (check appropriate response):

Has Has not done intrastate, interstate or foreign business in this State before qualification or registration as a foreign Corporation or after the qualification or registration was cancelled.

NOTE: If the box in Part (F) is checked indicating that the Corporation has done intrastate, interstate or foreign business in Maryland before registering or qualifying or after the registration or qualification has been cancelled; a penalty of \$200 must accompany this form in addition to the filing fee of \$100.00.

BY: Sonya Bernstein Digitally signed by Sonya Bernstein
Date: 2024.07.02 17:29:37 -04'00'
(Original signature of President or Vice President)

I hereby consent to my designation in this document as resident agent for this corporation.

BY: Linda Lawton
(Original signature of Resident Agent)
Linda Lawton, Authorized Rep.

8/32-7031 01/23/2023 3:08 PM Received by California Secretary of State

8/432-7032 01/23/