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California Institute for Regenerative Medicine  
Independent Citizen's Oversight Committee

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing regarding the recent evaluation of proposals in response to the CIRM RFA 12-06: Stem Cell Genomics Centers of Excellence Awards. Over the past 24 hours, it has become apparent that changes to the scoring method may have unfairly penalized some proposals. Specifically, the original RFA clearly outlined the process for reviewing and scoring the applications:

"As each application will propose multiple Center-initiated Projects, reviewers will assign separate scores for each of the proposed Center-initiated Projects within an application. These project scores will be weighted proportionally to the funds requested for each project, and then combined to determine a score for the Center-initiated Project component of the application."

The actual process, however, was conducted in a very different manner, as stated in the CIRM Agenda item #7: "Reviewers could propose removal of individual Center Initiated Projects."

Thus, instead of giving the Center-initiated Project component of the application an aggregate score, as was described in the original RFA, there was a subsequent decision to eliminate the lowest scoring center-initiated projects from two of the center proposals (GC1R-06673 and GC1R-06708). The net effect was to significantly increase the overall scores of these proposals, placing them at the top of Tier 1. If the original scoring methodology had been used, it is very likely that the poor scores of the center-initiated projects that were eliminated would have placed the entire center proposal into Tier 2. Removal of poorly scored projects from the final scoring of a proposal is without precedent, and certainly not consistent with any NIH grant reviewing procedure, giving the appearance of preferential treatment of particular proposals.

Therefore, I request that the original scoring methodology be applied. I note that there were other center proposals ranked in Tier 1 (recommended for funding) whose scores were not raised by selective elimination of weak components. I feel strongly that the relative merits of all the proposals should be judged on a level playing field.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pui-Yan Kwok".

Pui-Yan Kwok, M.D., Ph.D. (on behalf of the entire center team)  
Henry Bachrach Distinguished Professor  
Program Director of GC1R-6702