

August 25, 2020

The ASBMB signs on United States v. Tao Amicus Brief

The following is a statement from Benjamin Corb, public affairs director for the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology:

“The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) joined the Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Asian Law Caucus in filing an [amicus brief](#) on Aug. 19 in the case of the [United States of America v. Feng Tao](#). In the brief, we contend that, while there is a threat of economic espionage and misappropriation of funds from foreign governments, the U.S. Department of Justice’s criminalization of administrative violations has targeted almost exclusively Asian American scientists and scientists with connections to China.

Prior to the [DOJ’s China Initiative](#), disclosure and conflict of interest problems, like this one, were considered administrative violations. Universities would take action against employees who violated their policies and/or they would work with their employees to ensure accurate reporting.

The amicus brief documents the DOJ’s increased pressure on universities and academic institutions to investigate Asian American scientists and the agency’s criminalization of conflict of interest and disclosure violations. Criminalizing offenses for which there is no evidence of economic espionage or misappropriation of funds damages the American research enterprise. It impedes international collaboration and sends the message that the U.S. does not want international scientists to contribute to American research.

Tao is not the only scientist who has been caught up in the DOJ’s China Initiative. American citizens, including [Sherry Chen](#), [Xiaoxing Xi](#), [Guoqing Cao](#), and [Wei Su](#), also have been subject to unwarranted investigations and charges. Cases against these three individuals were dropped after it became clear there was insufficient evidence of wrongdoing. However, their careers still suffered.

The ASBMB urges the scientific community to guard against racial profiling and nativism. We must stand in solidarity with scientists from diverse backgrounds who are eager to contribute their talents and knowledge for the common good.”