



School of Medicine

Neuroimmunology Research

VA Portland Health Care System
Mail Code R&D-31
3710 SW US Veterans Hosp Rd
Portland, OR 97239

tel 503 273-5113
fax 503 721-7975

vandenba@ohsu.edu

March 18, 2021

Oregon State Legislature
House Committee on Education

Re: Public University Venture Development Fund (HB 2441)

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chairs Neron and Weber and members of the committee:

I am writing in support of HB 2441 to renew the University Venture Development Fund (UVDF) tax credit program, which supports promising university discoveries in moving out of the lab and into Oregon's economy.

The translation of basic research taking place at OHSU, other public universities in Oregon, and across the U.S., into meaningful commercial products and services is a long-term process and one that cannot proceed without funding at critical points along the way. The UVDF is instrumental in filling the gaps that exist in the process of translating groundbreaking new ideas and research discoveries from bench to bedside as viable commercial products.

My own research and innovation efforts have benefited directly from the UVDF through the OHSU Biomedical Innovation Program (BIP). In competition with several other ideas/inventions from OHSU faculty, I successfully made the case before a review committee for developing a new approach called "CD74 Decoy Peptides" for possible treatment of multiple sclerosis (MS) as well as other chronic inflammatory conditions. I've had a lifetime career interest in finding treatments for MS, spurred early on by onset of this debilitating disease in my own family.

Our research discovered that blocking the activity of a molecule called Macrophage Migration Inhibitory Factor (MIF), which is known to promote progression of MS, would be a potential new approach for treating this disease. We reasoned that using small component peptides of the CD74 receptor for MIF could bind to MIF in blood plasma and prevent its binding and signaling through the cell-bound CD74 receptor. The committee agreed that this was an innovative approach and awarded us BIP grant money to carry out seminal experiments that showed the ability of CD74 Decoy Peptides to neutralize the strong inflammatory effects of MIF. As a result of this support, my program was able to patent the idea in record time and we are now in the process of licensing this technology to an Oregon startup company, Artielle Immunotherapeutics, Inc., which is interested in further development of CD74 Decoy Peptides for treatment of progressive MS.

There are not currently other programs that provide for similar funding into early-stage proof-of-concept projects or entrepreneurial education and opportunities for faculty, students and others to gain experience in the commercialization of research. Without UVDF to support early-stage commercialization out of OHSU, and our fellow Oregon universities, Oregon will be less able to contribute and compete in the global innovation economy.

Thank you for your continuing interest and support of the UVDF program! I urge your support of HB 2441. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about my work or otherwise.

Sincerely,

Arthur A. Vandembark, PhD
Professor of Neurology
Professor of MMI