

BRIAN J. MAST, FLORIDA
CHAIRMAN

JAMES LANGENDERFER
STAFF DIRECTOR



GREGORY W. MEEKS, NEW YORK
RANKING MEMBER

SAJIT GANDHI
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

One Hundred Nineteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 24, 2025

Dr. Melissa Gilliam
President of Boston University
One Silber Way, 8th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

Dr. Melissa Gilliam,

I am deeply concerned that Boston University is serving as a platform for the weaponization of academia, where federally funded professors are spreading disinformation about the ongoing reorganization of USAID and its consequences. Brooke Nichols, an Associate Professor at BU, is at the heart of this dangerous hysteria through her creation of the “Impact Counter,” a dashboard of numbers that claim the restructuring of USAID has killed hundreds of thousands of people.¹

These lies are now being used as ammunition to attack the Administration. Most recently, Ranking Member Gregory Meeks stated in a letter to Secretary Rubio, “Boston University, on March 20, 2025, announced a tracker assembled by its faculty to assess the human cost of the funding cuts the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) imposed on USAID.”²

Unfortunately, hidden behind Dr. Nichols’ claim is an erroneous set of assumptions based on inaccurate information. This platform has become no better than a Russian bot farm or CCP propaganda. Boston University is creating a breeding ground for far-left activists to exploit academia for political gain which undermines the legitimacy of these institutions. Even if Dr. Nichols’ work was developed independently, her role as a faculty member and the platform

¹ <https://www.impactcounter.com/dashboard?view=table&sort=title&order=asc>,
<https://profiles.bu.edu/Brooke.Nichols>

² https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/_cache/files/8/0/803886d4-50fd-46d9-8f35-5bf343ff4c9c/0EBA5DEEDE021BE313F29C918AEAB58A3267D2D7174C776E887A4236734936BF.rm-meeks-letter-to-sec.-rubio-hearing-follow-up-6-16-25final-70-.pdf

afforded by BU's public communications appears as institutional endorsement, especially when it is plastered across BU's website.³

Secretary Rubio has set forward a policy that hinges on maintaining the life-saving work USAID was doing around the world.⁴

As of June 16, Dr. Nichols claims 232,000 children have died because of USAID's reorganization. As just one example of the faulty series of assumptions at play, Dr. Nichols wrongly calculates malnutrition-related deaths by dividing total federally-appropriated funding by average per-child treatment cost, ignoring that not all funds directly reach treatment and that potential reach isn't the same as actual impact. She also fails to account for overlapping causes and the complex, inconsistent nature of how malnutrition leads to death over time.

As a second example of her erroneous methods, Dr. Nichols bases her PEPFAR "projections" on an opaque and flawed layered modeling approach. The primary model uses outdated data and draws on five other models from separate studies, without clearly addressing their limitations or explaining how they interact. It also relies on inflated data. This "research" is full of oversimplified equivalence that ignores critical variables such as population density, patient load, program efficacy, and service type.

Nichols also asserts that such impacts would be "reassessed" to reflect the services resumed with the waiver implementation, but there's no indication that such an update ever occurred. Lastly, her projection of "future deaths" through 2030 appears to be little more than an annualized estimate multiplied over five years, with no methodological explanation. Endorsements from the HIV Modelling Consortium, housed at the University of South Africa, are cited as validation, but absent transparency, they don't substitute for actual analytical rigor.

The "Impact Counter" is nothing more than a masterclass in lazy, politically-charged disinformation that lacks any sort of analytical rigor. Dr. Nichols and her army of left-wing grad student activists should arm themselves with the facts before making baseless claims about the impact of U.S. foreign assistance. America's educational institutions should be a source the public can trust, but actions like these only further the demise of their credibility and contribute to needless political polarization.

The restructuring of USAID rids the stench of bloated DC-based NGOs, streamlines programmatic implementation, and focuses our foreign assistance with American national security priorities. This puts an end to USAID-funded drag shows, electric buses, and vanity climate projects in unstable regions. This continues the life-saving work USAID was designed to do and enhances the State Department's ability to strategically leverage foreign assistance.

³ <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2025/tracking-anticipated-deaths-from-usaid-funding-cuts/>; <https://www.bu.edu/ceid/>; <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2025/mathematician-tracks-deaths-from-usaid-medicare-cuts/>; <https://www.bu.edu/ceid/research/data-science-surveillance/>; <https://www.bu.edu/ceid/research/public-health-medical-preparedness-and-response-to-eids/>

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/on-delivering-an-america-first-foreign-assistance-program/>

1. What institutional safeguards does Boston University have in place to prevent federally funded research from being used as a vehicle for political advocacy?
2. Is it methodologically and ethically sound for academic researchers to publish projections of mass mortality, claimed as fact, based solely on hypothetical modeling, rather than verifiable, observed data?
3. Will future iterations of the Impact Counter account for potential long-term benefits of USAID restructuring, such as increased efficiency, strategic alignment, or reduction in programmatic redundancy?
4. How does Boston University evaluate the reputational and public trust implications of promoting speculative modeling tools that present worst-case outcomes as real-time public health data?
5. What standards does the university apply to differentiate between legitimate academic inquiry and politically-motivated activism, especially when the subject matter involves sensitive global health outcomes?

Thank you for taking the time to review my concerns, and I look forward to your responses in a timely manner.



Chairman Brian Mast
House Foreign Affairs Committee