

**Bloomberg School of Public Health**

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May 8, 2008

Via Email (letter only) and Overnight Delivery

The Honorable John D. Dingell, Chairman  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6115

Dear Chairman Dingell:

I am responding to your letter to me dated April 15, 2008 relating to the POPLINE database, as clarified by the email dated April 25 from Stephen Dunham, the Vice President and General Counsel of Johns Hopkins University, to Mr. John Sopko of the Committee's staff. As requested, we enclose two copies of the documents we are producing in response to your letter.

I will respond to each paragraph and request in your letter, but it may be helpful if I provide some background at the outset.

We understand that the Committee's inquiry is focused on the decision in February of 2008 to make the term "abortion" a "stop word" in the POPLINE database. The POPLINE database is funded by USAID and has been administered by the Bloomberg School's Center for Communication Programs for approximately 30 years. The most recent Agreement between the University and USAID covering the POPLINE database (and other activities) is a Cooperative Agreement with a receipt date of September 23, 2002. The Agreement is entitled "The Information and Knowledge for Optimal Health (INFO) Project." A copy of the 2002 Agreement (along with the RFA and the modifications since that date), as it exists in our files, is contained in Folder No. 3. The POPLINE database provides evidence-based information on reproductive health and family planning. It contains about 400,000 articles and other records.

I learned on April 4, 2008, that in February 2008 the administrators of the POPLINE database had put a "stop word" on the word "abortion" in the database. When I learned of this decision, I immediately reversed it. Full access to the database was restored within hours. As I have publicly said, I believe the decision was a mistake and we regret that it was made.



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Our understanding of why the "stop word" was implemented in February 2008 is set forth in response to your question 7, below. Paragraphs 6 and 7 explain the precipitating events that led to the decision. Specifically, the decision was made in response to concerns expressed by USAID about whether abortion advocacy materials were in the database, contrary to POPLINE's scope and USAID's expectations.

In addition, the decision was based in part on the POPLINE Selection Criteria that had been developed in 2002 and amended in 2007. A copy of the Criteria is included in Folder 5. Under those criteria, abortion advocacy materials are outside the scope of the POPLINE database.

Also included in Folder 5 is a document that sets forth a summary of a telephone conversation on 11/17/01 between representatives of the USAID IG's office and POPLINE administrators relating to POPLINE's scope. According to the notes, the representative of the USAID IG's office advised the POPLINE administrators "to put explicit mention into the written POPLINE scope definition used by JHU staff to select articles that materials promoting abortion are not to be included." Further, the USAID IG representative referred to language in the Cooperative Agreement that contained a "prohibition on 'promotion of abortion as a method of family planning.'"

Finally, the decision in February 2008 to make the term abortion a stop word in the POPLINE database, while wrong and now reversed, should be understood against the background of the POPLINE administrators' understanding of the purpose and scope of the Cooperative Agreement, the legal and contractual requirements that apply to USAID funding in general and that might be considered relevant to POPLINE, and USAID's views as understood by the POPLINE administrators.

The information and documents described below reflect what we have identified in our investigation to date. Each paragraph responds to the numbered paragraphs in your letter.

**1. All records relating to the decision to make the term "abortion" a "stop word" in the POPLINE database.**

Folder 1 contains documents that relate directly to the February 2008 decision to make "abortion" a "stop word" on POPLINE. This is the only time we have identified that "abortion" was made a "stop word" on POPLINE. As discussed with Mr. Sopko, we have not tried to identify and produce other documents that might be considered background for the February 2008 decision. As noted above, this has been a 30 year relationship with USAID and we have limited our response to the February 2008 decision.

**2. All records of communications between POPLINE administrators and Gloria Won, a librarian at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center.**

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Folder 2 contains all records of communications between POPLINE administrators and Gloria Won, a librarian at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center.

- 3. All records relating to the awarding of the POPLINE database to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health including the final contract and fees earned by Johns Hopkins.**

Folder 3 contains the 2002 Agreement (including the RFA), as it exists in our files, all modifications to the 2002 agreement, and a summary of the fees paid by USAID to Johns Hopkins under the 2002 Agreement. In accordance with our April 25 email, this production does not include other documents relating to the agreements and fees, such as sub-contracts, quarterly financial statements, work plans and budgets, budget correspondence, documents reflecting particular payments, etc.

- 4. All records of communications between Johns Hopkins and the U.S. Agency for International Development related to the POPLINE database.**

Per our agreement, Folder 4 contains records of communications since January 1, 2008 between Johns Hopkins and USAID relating to POPLINE.

- 5. Please explain the "POPLINE criteria" mentioned in your statement of April 4, 2008.**

POPLINE developed the Selection Criteria for inclusion of materials in the POPLINE database in 2002. The Criteria are based on the mission and scope of the POPLINE database and the requirements of the Cooperative Agreement with USAID, as understood by the POPLINE administrators. The Selection Criteria were amended in 2007. We note that both sets of Criteria exclude "abortion advocacy materials," as well as other subjects. The 2002 and the 2007 Criteria, as well as a memorandum with notes of an 11/17/01 conversation between POPLINE administrators and USAID IG representatives, are enclosed in Folder 5.

- 6. Please indicate in writing the "two items" which USAID officials identified to POPLINE administrators as supporting "abortion advocacy".**

The initial message from USAID was a voicemail message left for Mr. Earle Lawrence, the POPLINE project director, from Ellen Starbird, Deputy Director of USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health. Mr. Lawrence does not recall the specific words used. His best recollection is that the message referred generally to two articles related to abortion about which USAID had questions. Mr. Lawrence understood from the message that USAID had concerns that the articles constituted abortion advocacy that should not be included in the database. In response to the message, Mr. Lawrence reviewed recent entries and identified the

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December 2007 issue of *A: The Abortion Magazine*, which included seven articles, and concluded that it constituted abortion advocacy and did not meet the POPLINE selection criteria. Mr. Lawrence, therefore, directed his staff to remove it from the database. Mr. Lawrence believes USAID may have reviewed two of the seven articles and concluded that they were abortion advocacy materials, but he does not recall that they identified specific articles.

**7. A written explanation as to why the identification of two items related to abortion advocacy resulted in the complete designation of "abortion" as a "stop word".**

In mid-February 2008, in a voicemail message, Ellen Starbird, Deputy Director of USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health, informed the Johns Hopkins POPLINE director, Mr. Earle Lawrence, that a high level USAID Assistant Administrator had asked about the POPLINE data base and that USAID had questions about two items in the data base. Mr. Lawrence understood from the message that USAID was concerned that the items were abortion advocacy materials and should be removed from the database. She asked Mr. Lawrence to call about USAID's concerns.

On review of recent entries to the database, Mr. Lawrence identified a recent magazine entry that constituted abortion advocacy materials that did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the database and which he believed contained the articles referred to by USAID. The issue of the magazine was therefore removed from the database.

Mr. Lawrence ultimately reached Ms. Starbird a couple of days later — we believe on February 18, 2008. Mr. Lawrence does not recall specifically what was said, but in general his understanding was and is as follows: Mr. Lawrence told Ms. Starbird that a magazine had been removed from the database because it constituted abortion advocacy materials and did not meet the POPLINE criteria. Mr. Lawrence understood from the conversation that this was the publication about which USAID had concerns. They discussed if there were additional materials on the database that would be considered abortion advocacy materials which did not meet the criteria for the POPLINE database. Mr. Lawrence understood that USAID was concerned that there might be other abortion advocacy materials on the database which should be removed. Since the database contains approximately 400,000 records, going back 30 years, Mr. Lawrence said that the database might contain such materials. The USAID administrator and Mr. Lawrence discussed if these materials could be removed from the database. Mr. Lawrence said that it would take substantial time and effort to identify any abortion advocacy and other materials that did not belong on the database. Mr. Lawrence and the USAID representative discussed the problem of how to deal with USAID's concern that the database might contain abortion advocacy materials that should not be included in the POPLINE database. Mr. Lawrence said it would be technically possible to set "abortion" as a "stop word" on a temporary basis to allow a review of the database to take place. Mr. Lawrence and the USAID

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administrator discussed the merits of implementing this suggestion. Mr. Lawrence then told Ms. Starbird that he would implement the stop word. Ms. Starbird said nothing in response.

- 8. Please identify the exact date when the term "abortion" was designated as a "stop word".**

The designation was implemented in two steps on February 19 and 20, 2008.

- 9. Please identify the individual(s) who made the decision to designate "abortion" as a "stop word".**

The decision was made by Earle Lawrence, Project Director of INFO at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Communications Programs, after discussing it with Ms. Ellen Starbird, Deputy Director of the Office of Population and Reproductive Health at USAID. Before directing implementation, Mr. Lawrence informed his supervisor, Jane Bertrand, Director of the Center for Communication Programs. Neither I nor others in management of the Bloomberg School of Public Health or the University were informed of this decision or action.

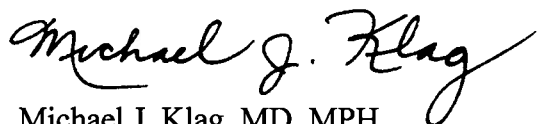
- 10. Please identify any other terms that USAID officials or POPLINE administrators designated as "stop words" for searches.**

The word "abortion," in all of its derivations, in English, French and Spanish, was subject to the "stop word." A list of the words is produced in Folder 1.

I wish to say again that we regret the decision to block "abortion" as a search term in the POPLINE database. I immediately ordered that this decision be reversed as soon as I heard of it. In my judgment, the decision was an overreaction to the inquiries from USAID and the concerns about the inclusion of materials that might violate the scope of the POPLINE database and USAID's expectations.

If you have any questions about this response or the materials we are producing, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Klag, MD, MPH  
Dean

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**Attachments**

cc: The Honorable Bart Stupak, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable John Shimkus, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

(via delivery to John Sopko)