

Monday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and other honorable members of the Committee. My name is Derek Hernandez and I am a Colby College senior from New York City. I am testifying in support of LD 1601 because CRISPR is the reason why I came to a school such as Colby and why I chose to study abroad at Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Science.

When I first learned about CRISPR my junior year of high school, I instantly fell in love. Having the capacity to genetic edit organisms, as well as seeing the results relatively immediately, was fascinating for me as a young kid from a low-income neighborhood. Growing up, I was strongly advised by my mother to go to school and do my best. Without having guidance, or an example of a student who went to college growing up, I had no idea what I wanted to do or what could be done with an education. CRISPR solved that problem for me. It filled me with curiosity and a poise to better understand and study such a phenomena.

I have had the honor of working with Dr. Fernández Robledo on a CRISPR project focused on enhancing the process of successfully genetically editing an oyster parasite. Through this project, I successfully achieved one of the first goals I set for myself before coming to Colby, to get published. Simultaneously, I also have my own project that I have been working on for three years at Colby, which is also a CRISPR project that has a goal of altering the body pigmentation of bugs which are commonly found in our backyard. Though I never fantasized about studying oyster parasites or bugs in our backyards, knowing that such research will help us better understand these organisms along with human benefits as well, such as biomedical implications, was revolutionary.

All this goes to say that CRISPR is capable of producing ground breaking research, not to mention CRISPR receiving its first Nobel Prize in 2020, while also serving as a inspirational scientific practice for young students and instructors. CRISPR provides people with a practical alternative to some of the big questions and problems we face as a society. CRISPR allows us to answer ‘What if’ and ‘What if not’ questions with results relatively efficiently. Furthermore, these impacts of CRISPR only supplement the multitude of reasons why genetic editing is important for society scientifically, economically, politically, and individually; which you have heard of already and will hear more of.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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