

AID Acts on Erickson Case

James M. Erickson, the former director of malaria research for the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), recently obtained a federal court order forcing AID to reach a decision on his status at the agency. He has been kept on paid leave for 18 months while AID pondered the charges against him (*Science*, 29 July, p. 521).

The deadline set by the court at Erickson's request was 6 October. On that day, AID proposed to find Erickson guilty of bad judgment, misconduct, and sexual harassment. The penalty: suspension without pay for 14 days. Erickson apparently will be returned to full salary afterward.

"This is a clever and tricky decision," says Charles Aschmann, Erickson's lawyer. The penalty appears to have been made small, Aschmann says, to preclude an appeal outside AID. Had the suspension been increased by one day, it would have been possible to appeal to an external review board. Had Erickson been fired, he would be able to appeal in court, which he would like to do.

During the course of litigation, Erickson discovered that no one had come forward as a victim of sexual harassment to file a formal complaint against him. His superiors at AID, however, did seek out and obtain statements from a woman who said she had been harassed. Because the woman never filed a complaint, AID had no basis to proceed against Erickson under antidiscrimination law, but punished him instead for bad judgment and personal misconduct.

AID spokesman Jerry Lipson declined to comment on the penalty, other than to say it had merely been proposed, and that Erickson has 30 days to respond.

Meanwhile, the post of malaria research chief at AID was filled on 1 September by Colonel Carter Diggs, who directed a similar program at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. In addition, six new consulting advisers have been named, including Adetokunbo Lucas of the Carnegie Corporation in New York; Robin Powell of the National Board of Medical Examiners in Philadelphia; Margaret Perkins of Rockefeller University in New York; Peter Reeve, a vice president of Invitron Corp. of Redwood City, California; Kenneth Stuart of the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute; and William Weidanz of the Hahnemann University in Philadelphia.

The repercussions from the Erickson case, first brought to public attention by an article in the 15 June issue of *Science and Government Report*, seem to have stirred doubts about

the future of basic malaria research in AID's policy office, as revealed in a flurry of inter-office notes. In a memo to the director of AID dated 15 September, Richard Bissell, the assistant administrator for policy coordination, poses some questions about "serious operational difficulties" in malaria work. He hints at possible budget trimming because this field overlaps with research at the National Institutes of Health, the Army, and the Centers for Disease Control. "Before committing substantial additional resources to malaria research and other basic research efforts, it may be wise to reevaluate the

agency's existing research portfolio and develop consistent criteria for future funding," Bissell concludes.

Nyle Brady, AID's assistant administrator for science and technology, gave a vigorous response to Bissell in a memo dated 21 September. "The publicity given the [malaria] program as a result of a sexual harassment charge against one of our employees in no way indicates that significant progress is not being made," he wrote. Panels of experts have been appointed to "review the overall science in malaria vaccine development as well as the field trials." Brady found it a "disservice" to the agency to confuse the personal actions of one employee with the general achievements of the malaria network. ■ ELIOT MARSHALL

Health Problems of the Homeless

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) last month released a report on the health problems of the homeless which was promptly supplemented by a statement from the majority of panel members who felt the report was "too limited" and failed to express their "shame and outrage" over the growing homeless population.

Commissioned by Congress, the report by a panel of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) characterizes the health problems of the homeless and offers recommendations for smoothing eligibility requirements for health care and improving services.

The "supplementary statement," not included in the report, was signed by 10 of the 13 panel members including its chairman, Bruce C. Vladeck of the United Hospital Fund of New York.* It said that although the report was all right as far as it went, it "fails to capture our sense of shame and anger about homelessness," which it called "an outrage, a national scandal," and an "inexcusable disgrace."

The members also lamented the fact that the panel's mandate constrained it from examining the larger context and making recommendations dealing with "root causes" of homelessness.

*Other signatories were Drew Altman, commissioner, New Jersey Department of Human Services; Ellen L. Bassuk, Harvard Medical School; William R. Breakey, Johns Hopkins University; A. Alan Fischer, Indiana University School of Medicine; Charles R. Halpern, City University of New York Law School; Gloria Smith, Commissioner, Michigan Department of Public Health; Louisa Stark, Arizona State University; Nathan Stark, Kominers, Fort, Schlefer and Boyer of Washington, D.C.; and Phyllis Wolfe, Robert Wood Johnson/Pew Memorial Trust Health Care for the Homeless Project. The other three panel members were Judith R. Lave, University of Pittsburgh; Jack A. Meyer, New Directions for Policy, Washington, D.C.; and Marvin Turck, University of Washington.

The statement emphasized the need for low income housing, calling for federal funding to be restored to the 1981 level before it was subjected to a 60% cut by the Reagan Administration. It also urged that the minimum wage be raised to make housing more affordable. Noting that 37 million Americans have no health insurance, the statement said "the time has come to move towards establishing universal access to health care."

Frederick Solomon of the IOM says there was "tremendous discussion" leading to "a very rare kind of impasse" for an Academy report about what should be done with the supplementary statement. He says the conclusion that emerged from the Academy's multitiered review process was that the statement's inclusion would undermine the report's credibility. NAS president Frank Press told the *New York Times* that "the language was charged and polemical and emotional," and that the recommendations went beyond the expertise of the panel, which was primarily made up of health professionals.

IOM president Samuel Thier says the housing and minimum wage recommendations, which were contained in the original version of the report, could not be endorsed because they would have had to be bolstered by far more analysis than the panel was constituted to conduct. (Two of the three panel members who did not sign the statement are professional economists.) "What's frustrated me in this whole thing is there are so many things in the report which, if implemented," would "make us a lot better off than we are."

The official report, "Homelessness, Health, and Human Needs," reiterates the