

# The Massachusetts Society for Medical Research, Inc.

FOUNDED 1953

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The Editors

*The Worcester Telegram & Gazette*

20 Franklin Street

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Worcester, MA 01615-0012

Dear Editors:

There is always the risk that untrue “urban myths” will be used in support of worthy ideas. Leigh Grady’s advice (Letters, March 12, 2004, “Theft of family pets is a hidden industry”) that pet owners keep accurate and updated identity materials for their pets and tattoo or microchip them deserves support

But when she claims, among other points, that missing pets have been stolen for research laboratories, she is repeating a myth. First, let it be noted that many missing pets have been accidentally killed by automobiles or other animals, become feral, or have been taken by people in domestic disputes. Laboratories in Massachusetts are forbidden from using pound animals and Massachusetts pounds are forbidden from selling or giving their animals to laboratories anywhere. And this has been state law for more than 20 years. Most laboratories use purpose-bred animals because of the scientific need to know about the animal’s history and care.

Credible reports of stolen pets showing up in Massachusetts laboratories are nil. Laboratory animal use is one of the most heavily regulated activities imaginable, with local, state and federal law and inspection – and in Massachusetts inspection is not restricted to just the USDA and city inspectors: the Animal Rescue League and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals may also inspect facilities.

Keeping pets safe is certainly worth everyone’s attention. Using a scare tactic and a false impression does not help that cause.

Sincerely,

Alan B. Dittrich, PhD

President