



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

## Survey: Mayoral candidates on BU biolab

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A recent *Boston Globe* survey of the 12 candidates in the running to become the next mayor of Boston solicited opinions on a variety of public policy matters. Candidates were asked specifically about controversies over permitting casino gambling, Walmart and Chic-Fil-A in the city, and their responses were [published](#) on July 31, 2013.

Unfortunately, the candidates were not asked about a matter that, arguably, is far more critical to the safety and well-being of the residents of Boston than blackjack tables, discount stores or chicken sandwiches from a franchise owned by a gay-rights opponent and that is whether to permit Level-4 biological research (involving such deadly agents as Ebola and SARS) to be conducted at the BU Biolab located on Albany Street in the South End.

As a South End resident who has written previously on this issue, I am concerned that this topic has not been on the front burner, and not addressed in the July 31 *Globe* survey. Actually, given the several mile radius that could be affected by a security breach at the site, this is not just a concern for neighborhoods in the South End and Roxbury, but for the entire city and the surrounding area.

Mayor Tom Menino is on record as being in favor of permitting Level-4 research at the Albany Street facility. But with his tenure drawing to a close and with the matter still open to debate, I approached the City Hall hopefuls two weeks ago with this inquiry:

"I write the Crime & Punishment blog for Boston.Com. I am surveying the mayoral candidates on the question of allowing Level 4 biological research to be conducted at the B.U. Biolab on Albany Street. I would appreciate a Yes/No response or a paragraph response to be published on Boston.Com."

Most of the candidates responded, and more often than not with some explanation for their position. For one of the two candidates who did not respond, I borrowed a statement he had made just last week on the issue (as indicated).

Overall, the candidates tended to have a very different posture from Mayor Menino. The tally of opinions for permitting Level-4 research:

**2 favor, 8 oppose, 1 abstention, and 1 no response**

The responses are provided candidate-by-candidate in alphabetical order:

**Felix Arroyo:**

"No, I do not support Level 4 research at the BU Biolab. I believe that everyone should have a voice in the direction of our city, and especially those most affected by the decision at hand. There has been strong and consistent opposition from the community and I agree that it is not appropriate to perform research with hazardous Level 4 agents in a densely populated area. I support banning Level 4 research in Boston as it has been done in Cambridge, where safe research and innovation has flourished while also protecting the health of its residents."

**John Barros:**

When I was Executive Director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, I fought against Level 4 research at the nearby biolab. As Mayor, I would not permit Level 4 research to be conducted there or anywhere else in the city.

**Charles Clemons:**

Although he did not respond, Clemons offered this opinion during an August 14, 2013 online [debate](#) shown on Boston.Com: The biolab should never have been built in the city.□

**Dan Conley:**

Understanding that the issue is the subject of pending litigation, Dan Conley preferred not to articulate a position at this time.

**John Connolly:**

"I believe this advanced research presents an opportunity for job creation and research that may lead to groundbreaking medical breakthroughs. Now we must ensure that BU takes all steps necessary and works with the community and the city government to make sure the facility is safe."

**Rob Consalvo:**

Yes.□

**Charlotte Golar-Richie:**

"I support a compromise proposal that would not include allowing level 4 biological research. Instead, I feel the lab should focus their research on those diseases that disproportionately impact the community where the lab is located, which includes diseases like obesity, heart disease, and sexually transmitted diseases. Neighborhood residents should have access to job opportunities and training to take advantage of jobs at all levels and, as mayor, I would require a clearly articulated safety plan to address the community's concerns about leaks into the air and waterways."

**Michael Ross:**

"While I believe that Boston needs to remain a nation-wide biomedical destination and leader in the research field for the industry, it has become increasingly clear that the applicants have failed to demonstrate adequate safeguards such a facility requires and have failed to responsibly permit the laboratory. Given these shortcomings, I cannot support a BSL-4 lab in that location."

**Bill Walczak:**

I am firmly against the Biolab. As a person who has been in public health for over thirty years, I believe that having a facility this close to such a densely populated area is counter to best practices in locating such facilities. No one can guarantee the safety of the facility, including the government, from either a biohazard incident occurring within or from a terrorist attack against the facility.

**Marty Walsh:**

As mayor I would oppose the Biosafety Level-4 (BSL-4) laboratory at the Boston University Medical Campus in the South End. A laboratory handling dangerous diseases and pathogens like Ebola, smallpox, and anthrax, which cannot be cured or contained if there were to be an outbreak, has no place in such a populous neighborhood. BU's Medical Campus has 50,000 residents living within a mile of its laboratories. An outbreak would be an immediate threat to the patients and staff at nearby Boston Medical Center, as well as to Boston's many homeless citizens that receive services at shelters and service agencies only a few hundred feet away from the laboratory. The Boston Marathon attack showed us how much devastation can be caused by a couple of individuals with homemade weapons in a densely populated area. The damage that could result from a terrorist gaining access to dangerous material in a BSL-4 laboratory, which exists in a similarly populated area, is unthinkable. As mayor, I will ensure that Boston remains on the cutting edge of medical research by partnering with biotech companies, hospitals, colleges, and universities. Boston can continue its consistent track record of bold innovation through these partnerships, and possibly even allow for a BSL-4 laboratory if there is a safer plan and the right location for it, but we cannot risk our safety by carelessly pursuing these benefits. □

**David James Wyatt:**

No response received.

**Charles Yancey:**

I am opposed to Level 4 research anywhere in the city, but especially at the BU biolab on Albany Street. This is populated area in the middle of many low income families. I have heard testimony from police and fire officials indicating that they have had no training in how to respond if a Level 4 pathogen is released into the air. Having research with Level 4 pathogens makes no sense until an effective response plan is in place.