

Brian Beach
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September 15, 2021

Re: Tang Data Request

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to offer my support for James Tang's request to access the CDC's restricted use data.

James is completing an honors thesis, under my supervision, in the economics department at Vanderbilt University. Our honors program is for highly motivated students interested in doing independent research and requires that students earn at least an A- in each of the core economics courses. James clearly fits this description. James is a double major (economics and mathematics) and he is minoring in scientific computing. He spent the last summer as a healthcare data scientist intern, and he has previous research assistant experience where he primarily coded programs to clean data and provide high level analyses. These facts, along with the fact that James also earned an A in my public economics class, allow me to speak confidently in his ability to perform policy-relevant work.

As to the importance of the work, James' thesis aims to further our understanding of how local economic conditions affect population health. Some of the best evidence on this topic compares changes in health in areas of the country that lost more jobs because of trade-induced competition to areas of the country that were less affected by international trade. Those results suggest that *deteriorating* economic conditions undermine health and are a contributing factor to the opioid epidemic. Given the addictive nature of opioids, however, it is unclear whether subsequent improvements in local economic conditions can reverse this damage. James' thesis aims to answer to that question by examining whether communities that were shielded from competition because of the Trump administration's trade policies fared better than those that did not receive as much preferential treatment.

In short, access to the restrictive data set is thus crucial for James' analysis, which has the potential to offer key insights for policymakers interested in combatting the opioid epidemic. James has also been in touch with university administrators to craft a plan to handle the data, and so I would emphasize that the data and the analysis would be handled responsibly.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Beach', with a stylized, flowing script.

Brian Beach

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