



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 6, 2022

Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D.
Acting Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Acting Director Tabak:

We are proud to support the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) mission to enhance our nation's health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability. We are, however, deeply concerned that the NIH has denied sanctuary to dozens of chimpanzees under government care housed at the Alamogordo Primate Facility (APF) on Holloman Air Force Base (AFB) in New Mexico.

Through passage of the Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance, and Protection (CHIMP) Act, Congress directed the NIH to create a national sanctuary for retiring chimpanzees no longer needed for biomedical research. The 32 surviving chimpanzees on Holloman AFB have not been used in research for two decades and since at least 2015, the NIH has acknowledged that these chimpanzees were no longer needed for research.

The NIH's stated justification that the health status of the chimpanzees is too precarious to allow their relocation to a sanctuary under Animal Welfare Act (AWA) regulations is not supported by publicly available records and does not follow the regulations. Those regulations do not require certainty that the transport of primates poses no risk. In fact, one of the AWA regulations that the NIH has cited as preventing transportation actually stipulates that primates who are not in optimal health can be transferred specifically for purposes of obtaining veterinary care for their condition.¹

Chimp Haven was created and designed to meet the psychological and physical wellbeing of chimpanzees who were previously used in biomedical research—which includes the chimpanzees currently at APF. The sanctuary, situated on over 200 acres of forest in Louisiana, has cared for over 400 chimpanzees, most of whom were used in biomedical research at facilities like APF. The APF, on the other hand, was designed to meet the needs of biomedical testing and research, research that is no longer being conducted and living conditions that are not designed to promote the well-being of the chimpanzees.

¹ 9 C.F.R. § 3.90(c)

In addition, we are troubled by what appears to be a high rate of euthanasia at the facility. Twelve chimpanzees have died under the management of Charles River Laboratories at APF since October 2019, and available records show that at least half of the deaths were reported as euthanasia. In her report, *The Welfare of the Chimpanzees at the Alamogordo Primate Facility* (enclosed), the Director of the Animal Welfare Science Program at the Lincoln Park Zoo, Dr. Katherine Cronin cites concerns regarding APF, including:

- *“The current criteria for euthanasia may set too low of a threshold. The APF environment and management strategy may encourage chimpanzees to meet some criteria that lead to a euthanasia decision.”²*
- *“When a chimpanzee is isolated at APF for observation, it is likely that the individual will become depressed and have reduced interest in food.”³*
- *“With the current practices at APF, loss of appetite seems inevitable for many chimpanzees, inviting early euthanasia.”⁴*

Population modeling by Lisa Faust, Ph.D., Vice President of Conservation Science and Director of the Alexander Center for Population Biology at Lincoln Park Zoo predicts the APF chimpanzee population will persist until at least 2038 (17 years) and up to 2053 (32 years),⁵ yet Charles River Laboratories claims the population will be extinct by August of 2027.⁶

By transferring these 32 chimpanzees to Chimp Haven, the NIH can provide them with optimal long-term care, while potentially saving millions of taxpayer dollars over their lifetime. The NIH is spending nearly five times more (*\$124 vs \$26 per chimpanzee, per day*)⁷ than necessary to keep chimpanzees at APF instead of transferring them to Chimp Haven.

We call on you to consider the welfare and the future of the chimpanzees at Holloman AFB who deserve to live out their lives at Chimp Haven as Congress intended under the CHIMP Act. It is in the best interest of these chimpanzees and of American taxpayers. We ask that you revisit the decision to keep these chimpanzees at APF and expedite their transfer to the Chimp Haven sanctuary. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/

 Melanie Stansbury
 Member of Congress

/s/
Bill Cassidy
United States Senator

² Katherine A. Cronin, Ph.D., *The Welfare of Chimpanzees at the Alamogordo Primate Facility*, 7.

³ Ibid, 6.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lisa Faust, Ph.D., *Alamogordo Chimpanzee Population Modeling 2020*.

⁶ NIH response to letter dated Nov. 18, 2021, from Senator John Kennedy

⁷ <https://orip.nih.gov/comparative-medicine/programs/vertebrate-models/chimpanzee-management-reports>

/s/
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

/s/
John Kennedy
United States Senator

/s/
Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

/s/
Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress

/s/
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress