

# United States Senate

November 4, 2021

Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.  
Director  
National Institutes of Health  
Building 1  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Director Collins:

I appreciate your leadership and the essential work you do in support of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) critical mission. However, I have learned that the NIH is wasting Americans' hard-earned tax dollars and ignoring federal law by keeping chimpanzees at laboratory facilities in New Mexico and Texas instead of transferring them to the national chimpanzee sanctuary, Chimp Haven, a gem in my home state of Louisiana.

The Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance, and Protection Act (CHIMP Act) established a cost-efficient federal sanctuary system operated by Chimp Haven in Louisiana. Further, the legislation mandates the NIH to retire all federally owned chimpanzees no longer needed for research to this sanctuary. In 2015, the NIH committed to sending government owned chimpanzees to the sanctuary.<sup>1</sup>

I am increasingly frustrated by the NIH's refusal to meet its obligation and send the remaining government-owned chimpanzees held at the Alamogordo Primate Facility (APF) in New Mexico and the Keeling Center for Comparative Medicine and Research (KCCMR) in Texas<sup>2</sup> to Chimp Haven. Not only is Chimp Haven far better suited to meet the complex needs of chimpanzees previously used in biomedical research, but the cost of care is dramatically cheaper.

The laboratory facilities in New Mexico and Texas spend three to five times more than necessary to house chimpanzees compared to Chimp Haven. In fact, the NIH's own data shows that it costs \$124 at APF and \$97 at KCCMR, versus \$26 at Chimp Haven per chimpanzee, per day.<sup>3</sup> This fiscal irresponsibility is inexcusable. The Government Accountability Office reported that the "NIH's costs are lowest at Chimp Haven" and that costs will continue to increase at labs as populations decline.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/nih-will-no-longer-support-biomedical-research-chimpanzees>

<sup>2</sup> The NIH announced on October 24, 2019, that it is holding back APF chimpanzees from sanctuary; and it announced on September 24, 2021, it is holding back KCCMR chimpanzees from sanctuary as well.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/676708.pdf>

It appears the NIH is stonewalling Congress and failing to prioritize the welfare of these chimpanzees and the taxpayers' wishes. The extraordinary conflict of interest and lack of transparency is deeply concerning. The NIH's Veterinary Review Panel merely rubber-stamped the decision by an APF's Charles River Laboratories-employed veterinarian to keep 44 chimpanzees from moving to the sanctuary, without even examining the chimpanzees in person or considering the many benefits of the preserve. Nine of those chimpanzees have since died and at least half were euthanized. Additionally, virtually no information has been shared about how the decision was made to keep at least 49 chimpanzees at the KCCMR lab. Claims the NIH is concerned about the chimpanzees' welfare are inconsistent with the decades of pain and trauma chimpanzees experienced as a result being subjected to biomedical and behavioral research.

At Chimp Haven, chimpanzees will enjoy a higher quality of life with superior care from the veterinary and behavioral teams. Just as important, chimpanzees at the sanctuary get to experience large social groups and a natural environment that stimulates the chimpanzees' minds and assists in their recovery from traumatic experiences as a result of their early years spent in laboratories.

Please provide the following by November 19, 2021:

- Detailed projected costs to house chimpanzees at APF and KCCMR for the next ten years;
- The NIH's contract with KCCMR to house chimpanzees at the laboratory facility;
- The NIH's Veterinary Panel Review Summaries for the chimpanzees located at KCCMR; and
- The NIH's plan to meet the agency's own recommendations that captive chimpanzees be maintained in ethologically appropriate environments including but not limited to sufficiently large, complex, multi-male, multi-female social groupings<sup>4</sup> at APF.

I see no valid reason for the NIH to continue housing retired chimpanzees at laboratory facilities where the chimpanzees' needs are not met and the cost to taxpayers is increasing. The chimpanzees at APF and KCCMR will thrive at Chimp Haven while saving taxpayer dollars.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



JOHN KENNEDY  
United States Senator

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<sup>4</sup> National Institutes of Health. (2013). Council of Councils Working Group on the Use of Chimpanzees in NIH-Supported Research Report. Retrieved from [https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/FNL\\_Report\\_WG\\_Chimpanzees\\_0.pdf](https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/FNL_Report_WG_Chimpanzees_0.pdf)