

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. and Vice President Kamala D. Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

April 19, 2021

Dear Mr. President and Madam Vice President,

We, the undersigned group of animal advocacy organizations, primate sanctuaries, scientific organizations, ethicists, and scientists respectfully urge the Biden-Harris administration to refrain from authorizing the creation of a “stockpile” of nonhuman primates in the United States for use in biomedical or other scientific research. The suggestion to “stockpile” nonhuman primates, openly discussed by organizations dedicated to promoting their use in experiments who have shared their intent to raise a “monkey shortage issue” with your administration, is a shortsighted and opportunistic recommendation that omits ethical and moral considerations. Continued investment in nonhuman primate models will also distract from, and slow down, the exciting progress in the development and use of innovative human-based models, that better reflect the biology of humans.

The current pandemic has highlighted the need for predictive human-relevant models that utilize human biology to deliver superior results. More than any administration in history, you have the opportunity—and the obligation—to invest in human-based methods that will better prepare us for future pandemics and prevent, treat, and cure the numerous non-communicable diseases that have not been successfully addressed by current preclinical animal experiments. These investments would include *in vitro* options such as “organ-on-a-chip” technology that was recently used by Israeli scientists to develop a novel cancer drug^[1], and organoids such as lab grown “mini-brains” used by a team from Johns Hopkins University to demonstrate that certain human neurons express the receptor used by SARS-CoV-2 to infect lung cells.^[2] Increasingly sophisticated computer models can simulate human biology and disease progression. These alternatives are catching hold across scientific disciplines and proving fruitful without the use of animals.^[3]

The moral quandary when considering the use of nonhuman primates is that if these animals are similar enough to humans to act as proxies in biomedical research, they are similar enough to undermine confidence that their use is ethically permissible, thereby supporting their exclusion from such research. Nonhuman primates are not commodities to be stockpiled and used at our leisure. They are highly social, complex, emotional individuals. Like humans, they live in social groups and relationships are essential for their wellbeing. Like humans, they have complex and flexible means of communication with gestures, facial expression, postures, and vocalizations. They have complex cognition and problem-solving skills. Nonhuman primates deserve a life free from suffering, pain, and confinement, all of which inevitably await them if they are stockpiled for research.

Aside from these serious moral and ethical concerns, the use of animal experiments too often results in misleading outcomes that delay genuine scientific progress. Over 90% of drugs that show promise in animal testing trials do not work in humans.^[4] This begs the question, how many potentially effective treatments for *humans* did not advance to humans because they did not work in animal trials? ^[5] Nonhuman primates are not miniature humans, and our species differences are considerable enough to render their use in research largely misleading, risking downstream problems in reproducing positive outcomes in human studies. To help the millions of Americans who need new and better medical treatments and drugs, we cannot afford to keep funding ineffective animal experiments.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of animal testing and the need for more human-based models, this year, members of Congress have introduced three pieces of bipartisan legislation that encourage the development of alternative models and push our nation beyond the antiquated, animal-based scientific approaches of decades past. The FACT Act (H.R. 197), the AARF Act (A.R. 1905) and the Humane Research and Testing Act (H.R. 1744) will encourage and assist agencies in their efforts to reduce animal testing and develop superior human-relevant research methods. These bills are a beacon of change and would allow us to harness the possibilities afforded by a new era of scientific discovery.

Consideration should also be given to whether this “monkey shortage” is an impending disaster, or an opportunistic use of the pandemic pushed by the animal research community, which for years has advocated for increased use of these animals. Given that nearly 71,000 nonhuman primates were used for research in the United States in 2018 (the last year for which statistics are available), and that an additional 35,000 were held, but not used, for research that year, it is difficult to believe that there are not enough of these animals available to the research community.^[6] Moreover, because China stopped exporting nonhuman primates bred for research purposes during the pandemic, scientists developed innovative methods to reduce the number used in research protocols, and bypassed some experiments altogether, prompting questions about the need for the high numbers used before the pandemic^[7].

There is no “monkey shortage” in the United States, and no need to authorize an accumulation of nonhuman primates on reserve. Please refuse pressure to establish a monkey colony as this would be a disservice to the American people who deserve the most innovative biomedical approaches available. We thank the Biden-Harris administration for your prioritization of evidence-based science in policy making decisions and urge you to support and invest in forward-thinking alternatives that will better model human biology and provide better treatments for human disease.

Respectfully,



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