



NONHUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

Input on report of the NIH Council of Councils Working Group on Assessing the Safety of Relocating At-Risk Chimpanzees

Recommendation 1: The NIH and the facilities that house NIH-owned and NIH-supported chimpanzees should relocate all of these chimpanzees to the federal sanctuary system unless relocation is extremely likely to shorten their lives.

The NIH and the research facilities that have experimented on these chimpanzees have already shortened—and impoverished—the lives of these self-aware, autonomous beings. For the years in which the chimpanzees were active or potential research subjects, their suffering and possible premature deaths were of secondary importance to the biomedical insights generated by their bodies, which researchers infected with life-threatening illnesses and diseases. It remains unclear to us why these research facilities now evince such belated concern for the chimpanzees' lives. That said, we agree with those in the sanctuary community who maintain that every chimpanzee held in a research facility, unless he or she is on the verge of death, deserves the opportunity to regain his or her autonomy and experience freedom and healing at a true sanctuary. This is the very least of what owed to them for all that has been taken from and done to them.

Recommendation 4: Both sending and receiving facilities should collaborate to jointly expand the technical assistance available to the receiving facility to care for at-risk chimpanzees.

Sanctuaries like Chimp Haven have years of experience and expertise in caring for chimpanzees with behavioral, social, and physical impairments such as those caused by captivity in research facilities. All the same, if a sanctuary requires technical assistance from a research facility, it should receive it.

Recommendation 6: When facilities disagree about whether to relocate a chimpanzee, independent expert veterinary opinion should be sought to inform the relocation decision.

We agree. We are deeply concerned about the possibility of research facility employees—whether through unconscious bias or deference to their own institutional interests—refusing to allow particular chimpanzees to be transferred to sanctuaries in order to suppress their stories. When nonhuman animals are transferred to sanctuaries, their individual stories emerge in the public sphere often for the first time, with a focus on how they're healing from and coping with the traumas of life as research subjects. Based in part on our organization's

experience with a research facility—the New Iberia Research Center—that used our clients Hercules and Leo and hundreds of chimpanzees in experiments, we believe priority number one for such facilities is to avoid negative publicity. To mitigate the possibility that a research facility would refuse the relocation of certain chimpanzees for fear of negative publicity, the NIH should go beyond enlisting the opinions of independent expert veterinarians to establish a panel of independent experts to jointly determine how best to prioritize and respect the interests of these exploited chimpanzees. Indeed, for all chimpanzees born in research facilities, this will be the first time in their lives that their interests will come first.

Additional Comments

In our view, “retirement in place” serves the interests of research facilities first and foremost, conflating life in research facilities with life in sanctuaries and suppressing the history of the suffering of chimpanzees at the hands of humans and human institutions. To suggest that any research facility that uses nonhuman animals in experiments comes anywhere close to providing the respect and freedom that sanctuaries do is a serious disservice to all nonhuman animals who remain imprisoned in them.