

DR. KEN LEVY

HOLT B. HARRISON ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LAW
PAUL M. HEBERT LAW CENTER
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY
110 LSU STUDENT UNION BUILDING
BATON ROUGE, LA 70803-0106
(225) 578-7365 • KEN.LEVY@LAW.LSU.EDU

Comment re: Hercules and Leo, Two Chimpanzees Confined at the New Iberia Research Center

Please note that this comment represents only my own beliefs and opinions, not those of LSU or LSU Law School. Moreover, whatever facts I state below are to the best of my knowledge.

Hercules and Leo are two ten-year-old chimpanzees who are currently confined at the New Iberia Research Center in New Iberia, Louisiana. Previously, they were confined – and tortured – at Stony Brook University. Specifically, while imprisoned in a cage in the basement of a university building for six years, their muscles were sliced by wires, and they were forced to undergo frequent general anesthesia, all in order to satisfy the curiosity of an anatomy professor about how humans evolved to walk straight-legged.

Hercules and Leo made international news last year after a New York judge ordered Stony Brook University to appear and justify its imprisonment of them following a habeas corpus lawsuit filed in Manhattan by the Nonhuman Rights Project.

In May 2015, when the Nonhuman Rights Project’s Notice of Appeal to the First Department in New York was pending, New Iberia Research Center stealthily colluded with Stony Brook University to transport Hercules and Leo out of New York jurisdiction and back to Louisiana.

Save the Chimps, a premiere chimpanzee sanctuary in South Florida, has offered to take care of Hercules and Leo for the rest of their lives at a projected cost of over \$2,000,000. At this sanctuary, Hercules and Leo would live on an island with two dozen other chimpanzees. The Nonhuman Rights Project has been waging a public campaign to persuade the New Iberia Research Center to accept Save the Chimp’s very generous offer. But so far, the New Iberia Research Center has stubbornly and callously refused.

Dr. Jane Goodall, one of the world’s most famous primate experts, stated: “I have been following for some time now the sad lives of both Hercules and Leo, and I really urge New Iberia to release them to sanctuary so that they can live out the rest of their lives in dignity. And, surely, there can be no good reason to prolong their lives of servitude. So please, I beg of you, do the right thing. We’ll all be so grateful, especially Leo and Hercules. Thank you.”

Dr. Goodall has also stated that “chimpanzees are highly social, intelligent, complex beings and need the social companionship of others of their kind.” In the wild, chimpanzees live very much like humans: in social groups of as many as 150 individuals with lifelong bonds. Like humans, chimpanzees communicate daily with the members of their group through calls, facial

expressions, body language, and touch. Chimpanzees maintain close bonds through grooming and close tactile contact with each other.

While most American research facilities are releasing chimpanzees to sanctuaries, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has prosecuted New Iberia Research Center, which imprisons approximately 230 chimpanzees, for over a dozen Animal Welfare Act violations over the last decade. As a result, they have been compelled to pay almost \$60,000 in fines. Meanwhile, Louisiana taxpayers are on the hook for all the money required to maintain this prison – millions of dollars – at a time of critical state budget shortfalls.

As members of a species that is exceptionally intelligent – cognitively, socially, and emotionally – and critically endangered, Hercules and Leo should not be treated like “things” that are exploited for trivial research. They deserve much better. So please urge University of Louisiana System President Savoie to do the right thing – both morally and financially – and move Hercules and Leo to Save the Chimps.

Please email me at Ken.Levy@law.lsu.edu or call me at (225) 578-7365 if you need any further information about this matter.