

August 15, 2023

The Honorable Lawrence Tabak
Acting Director
U.S. National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Director Tabak:

I write with concern about the future of our nation's biomedical innovation and preparedness as we have struggled to maintain a sufficient supply of nonhuman primates for biomedical research. Scientists have concluded that nonhuman primates are more useful for comparing how certain drugs and diseases impact humans, when compared to other animals such as mice or dogs. As nonhuman primate testing is used to contribute to significant medical innovation, including creating COVID-19 vaccines, I request information as to what steps the agency is taking to ensure we are able to continue with continued research despite current challenges to our nonhuman primate supply.

Though the United States maintains its own supply of nonhuman primates at National Primate Research Centers, the country has long relied on foreign imports of the animals to maintain the necessary pace for innovation. Nonhuman primates constitute 0.5 percent of all animals in U.S. biomedical research, yet the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine has expressed major concerns that the lack of a consistent supply of these animals will be detrimental to important progress being made. Nonhuman primates are particularly important to research because they possess similar anatomic, behavioral, and genetic qualities as humans. Advancements in treating Parkinson's and vaccines to combat COVID, Ebola, and polio all resulted from research using nonhuman primates. However, given current geopolitical circumstances, it is unclear if the United States will be able to provide scientists guaranteed access to nonhuman primates for their research.

One of the biggest factors in the shortage of nonhuman primates was the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) decision to block the export of laboratory monkeys in 2020 under the questionable justification that doing so would prevent the "spread of the coronavirus." In 2019, the U.S. imported 20,270 lab monkeys from the People's Republic of China, making up 60 percent of its total imports. Given that the CCP has long held a goal to achieve dominance in the industries that will define the 21st century, it is safe to assume that it will continue to restrict the export of nonhuman primates in order to maintain an edge in developing the latest innovations in drug and device research. Previous efforts to maintain a consistent supply of these animals, such as shifting to Cambodia, have not proven fruitful, due to the discovery that Cambodian officials were illegally trafficking long-tailed macaques. Without a steady stream of foreign nonhuman primates' imports, researchers must start thinking about alternatives that will ensure their

research passes necessary safety and quality tests and is effective in treating the intended issue. Otherwise, important innovation will come to a costly halt.

As the promise of what is to come in medical innovation continues to excite researchers, patients, and advocates across the country, it is critical that the National Institute of Health (NIH) is thinking about short and long-term solutions to ensure our nation's scientists have the best tools available to complete their research and save American lives. This community continues to assert that nonhuman primates are one of the most important tools to moving forward in medical innovation. Therefore, I respectfully request that you provide answers to the following questions:

1. Does the NIH currently have an adequate supply of nonhuman primates to complete its studies? If not, what contingency plans are in place?
2. What alternatives to nonhuman primate testing has the NIH explored to reduce the frequency of using these animals, given the shortage?
3. Does the NIH intend to expand its domestic nonhuman primate breeding program?
4. Does the NIH intend to expand their investment and use of testing procedures that do not use nonhuman primates?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator