

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

November 23, 2020

Scott Harris, MD, MPH
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Via e-mail: scott.harris@adph.state.al.us

Dear Dr. Harris,

Thank you in advance for your time. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide regarding an urgent matter related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which in Alabama has resulted in more than 232,000 cases and more than 3,400 deaths.¹ **Given the uncertainty of the reopening of Alabama and the continued high infection rates throughout the country, we urge you to intervene for the sake of public health and permanently end experiments on animals at laboratories and universities in your state, starting with those already deemed by institutions themselves to be non-essential during the initial shutdown because of COVID-19.**

In response to the shutdown, laboratories in Alabama and throughout the U.S. deemed experiments and the animals used in them to be "extraneous" or "non-essential," among other similar terms—and therefore euthanized thousands of these animals assigned to laboratory experiments. The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) instructed its experimenters to "limit in-person scholarship to essential research"² and to mark "priority cages,"³ suggesting that the school had plans to kill at least hundreds of animals.

PETA questions why any of these animals are being bought, bred, trapped, or experimented on in the first place since they're now, in

¹Covid in the U.S.: Latest map and case count. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 22]. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

²2020 April 6. Office of Research guidance. [accessed 2020 Aug. 13]. <https://www.uab.edu/research/home/business-continuity-plan>.

³2020 March 23. Marking priority cages. [accessed 2020 Aug. 13]. <https://www.uab.edu/research/home/arp-covid-19-guidance>.

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response to the pandemic, so readily being disposed of and since experiments are now being ended or delayed. Expending precious research resources and taxpayer funds on animal testing—especially experiments and the animals used in them deemed by the institutions themselves to be not “essential”—is the height of absurdity and waste and should not continue, nor should laboratory personnel endanger their health for such experiments.

Research facilities and universities, including UAB, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.⁴ Among those recently infected is Alabama Lt. Governor Will Ainsworth.⁵ Once-safe activities—including working in close proximity to others in enclosed spaces like laboratories—will continue to pose a risk to human health for the foreseeable future. Particularly given that so many of these animal experiments have already been determined to be non-essential, allowing animal experiments to resume in Alabama cannot be justified.

Moreover, if Alabama is forced to reverse its reopening, more animals will undoubtedly be euthanized and money that could otherwise have gone to more effective and human-relevant, non-animal studies benefiting public health will be wasted. The possibility that Alabama may need to shut down once more cannot be discounted. Dr. Anthony Fauci previously urged states with surging infection rates to “seriously look at shutting down” again.⁶ Thirty-one states have tightened restrictions in November in light of the worsening pandemic; other states, including Alabama, have extended previously implemented restrictions.⁷

As the head of the state health agency, you have the authority to intervene to prevent activities that pose a risk to public health. According to Ala. Code § 22-2-2(4), “whenever ... conditions prejudicial to health, or likely to become so, are found, proper steps shall be taken by the proper authorities to have such conditions corrected or abated.”⁸ Would you please intervene to end experiments on animals, starting with those previously deemed by institutions to be non-essential or described using similar terminology, which pose an unjustifiable risk to those working in laboratories and the public more broadly?

⁴Covid-19: U.S. records 1 million new cases in a week. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 16]. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/11/15/world/covid-19-coronavirus>.

⁵Alabama News Network Staff. 2020 Oct. 21. Lt. Governor Will Ainsworth tests positive for COVID-19. *Alabama News Network*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 9]. <https://www.alabamaneews.net/2020/10/21/lt-governor-will-ainsworth-test-positive-for-covid-19/>.

⁶Feuer W. 2020 July 9. States with severe coronavirus outbreaks should ‘seriously look at shutting down,’ Dr. Fauci says. *CNBC*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 17]. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/09/states-with-severe-coronavirus-outbreaks-should-seriously-look-at-shutting-down-dr-fauci-says.html>.

⁷COVID-19 restrictions: Map of COVID-19 case trends, restrictions and mobility. *USA Today*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 22]. <https://www.usatoday.com/storytelling/coronavirus-reopening-america-map/#restrictions>.

⁸Ala. Code § 22-2-2(4). <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/legal/assets/publichealthlawsofalabama.pdf>.

You can contact me at ShalinG@peta.org or 757-962-8325. We look forward to your reply to this rapidly developing and urgent matter. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shalin G. Gala". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S" that loops under the rest of the name.

Shalin G. Gala
Vice President, International Laboratory Methods
Laboratory Investigations Department