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Dear Dr. Tabak, Ms. Gomes, and Ms. Brookens:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters globally—to urge the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to review and consider canceling all contracts with Charles River Laboratories, including most urgently the contracts to manage and operate NIH animal laboratory facilities, including those of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). Furthermore, we ask that NIH fund the sanctuary placement of 1,000 macaques brought to the U.S. by Charles River.

The company is currently under civil and criminal investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice for alleged irregularities in its nonhuman primate supply chain. The company must be scrutinized before any more taxpayer dollars land in its pockets.

### **NIH Pays Charles River Hundreds of Millions of Taxpayer Dollars**

Since fiscal year 2018, NIH has contracted with Charles River for nearly \$280 million in taxpayer funds. More than a third of this money (\$107 million) is for the contract “Management, Operation, Professional, and Technical Support Services for NIAID Animal Care Facilities.”<sup>1</sup> This contract includes one building with hundreds of monkeys at the NIH Animal Center campus in Poolesville, Maryland. It also includes multiple NIAID buildings in which experiments on ferrets, rabbits, primates, chickens, ducks, mice, and other rodents are conducted in Bethesda, Maryland, and Hamilton, Montana, and that contain Animal Biosafety Level (ABSL) 3 and 4 laboratories, respectively.

As outlined in the statement of work from the [original contract solicitation](#), Charles River is charged with providing for the daily basic needs of animals in these facilities, such as supplying food and water, cleaning cages, conducting observations and health checks, etc. It is also responsible for cutting off parts of animals' ears and toes, tattooing, or other methods of identification used in the

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<sup>1</sup>The contract is identified as HHSN272201800004C, NIHAO201800001, and PIID 75N93018C00014.

laboratories; restraining, injecting, and bleeding animals; performing surgeries like vasectomies and splenectomies; collecting tissues and organs; coordinating the breeding, ordering, and transporting of animals; coordinating imports, exports, and quarantine of animals; maintaining records; maintaining equipment; and more.

### **Federal Investigation Into Monkey Imports and Exports May Implicate NIH**

The statement of work notes that when Charles River imports and exports animals used in laboratories, it must do the following:

Assist the Government in transferring of ownership and holding location of animals, including quarantine as necessary. *Ensure all pertinent rules, regulations, policies, and guidelines are followed.* Coordinate and *follow through on appropriate import/export documentation* and logistical support as appropriate to the origin/destination, health status, and weather conditions. [*Emphasis added.*]

Charles River may be failing to follow regulations and documentation requirements for the importation and exportation of primates. The company is under federal criminal and civil investigation for its importation of thousands of monkeys now being held in its domestic facilities, including those from which NIH may be receiving animals. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) has denied [re-export permits](#) for monkeys brought into this country illegally, and 1,000 monkeys now held at Charles River facilities who may have been wild-caught and illegally brought into the U.S. are in limbo.

NIH appears to have failed to oversee Charles Rivers' import practices, despite the significant sum of taxpayer money it pays to the company annually.

### **Charles River and NIH Should Fund Sanctuary Placement of Reportedly Trafficked Monkeys**

FWS has stopped the sale of these 1,000 endangered monkeys to laboratories, but the future of these animals is in doubt. They can't legally be used in experiments. However, they could go to a sanctuary here in the U.S. and live out their natural lives in peace and with dignity. PETA is urging both NIH and Charles River to release the monkeys to Born Free USA's Texas sanctuary and to provide funding for their lifetime care. Charles River has so far refused to meet with PETA and Born Free, and as you likely know, NIH has not publicly acknowledged that the company that runs many of its laboratories has apparently been implicated in a monkey-smuggling scheme.

### **Tuberculosis-Infected Monkey Escaped in Charles River-Operated NIH Facility, Posing Lab Leak Threat**

In November, PETA [alerted Dr. Anthony Fauci](#) to an incident in a Charles River-operated high-security NIAID ABSL-3 laboratory in Building 33 on the NIH Bethesda campus. On March 22, 2022, a marmoset infected with tuberculosis escaped from a cage. According to records obtained by PETA, the small monkey "crawled up the containment caging exhaust tubing and into the HVAC system." Staff spent a day trying to lure him out. When they were unsuccessful, the decision was made to kill him. Employees flooded the HVAC system with carbon dioxide—gassing the marmoset to death—and his lifeless body was then retrieved.

### **Multiple Violations of Animal Welfare Regulations at Charles River-operated NIAID Laboratories**

According to records that PETA obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, there have been multiple violations of federal animal welfare guidelines by Charles River-operated NIAID facilities in recent years. In 2021, three mice starved to death because they weren't able to reach

the food clumped in the top of their feed bin. In 2022, two chickens were found dead and an additional two were euthanized, after they were blocked from their food source. Later that year, seven baby mice died from hypothermia after the animal caretaker failed to conduct the mandated proper health checks, missing that the cage they were in had been flooded. At the Rocky Mountain Laboratories facility last year, animal technicians failed to appropriately install the valves into Hydropac pouches. As a result, mice held in the cages began showing clinical signs of disease consistent with potential dehydration, and they were all killed.

### **Charles River Admits It May Import Animals Posing a Public Health Threat**

Americans may be unwittingly funding the importation of diseases transmissible to humans. Since monkeys can't be screened for all the viruses they may carry, it's impossible to eliminate the public health risk associated with boxing up stressed and traumatized monkeys in small crates for a grueling trip around the globe. Charles River reported in its [U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filings](#) that “[i]n some cases, we may produce or import animals carrying infectious agents capable of causing disease in humans; and in the case of such a contamination or undiagnosed infection, there could be a possible risk of human exposure and infection and liability for damages to infected persons.”

The risk is real. A [case report](#) published a few months ago revealed that monkeys imported into the U.S. from Cambodia in 2020 and 2021 arrived infected with the deadly bacteria *Burkholderia pseudomallei* and that quarantine protocols consistently failed to identify monkeys harboring this pathogen. The bacterium is shed in feces, urine, blood, saliva, and pus and can survive in contaminated soil or water for years. Melioidosis, the infectious disease caused by the bacterium, has serious symptoms that range from acute septicemia (blood poisoning) to chronic infection, resulting in death for 10% to 50% of those infected. Over the past five years, Charles River imported thousands of monkeys from Cambodia, where the bacterium is confirmed to be endemic. To make matters worse, PETA uncovered [dozens of instances](#) in which Charles River failed to conduct proper veterinary inspections before trucking monkeys to laboratories across the country.

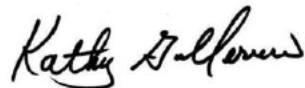
### **Investigate Charles River, and Pledge Funds for Sanctuary**

Charles River has consistently failed to follow the requirements outlined in NIH's solicitation:

*The NIAID experimental animals must be maintained under carefully controlled conditions to minimize research variables and allow the accurate interpretation of laboratory results. Consequently, it is essential that animal colonies be consistently and properly maintained to avoid any situation or condition such as undue stress, disease, animal misidentification, animal escape, etc., that might adversely affect experiments. The proper care of these animals is integral to the research performed at NIH. [Emphases added.]*

We urge NIH to reconsider paying hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to Charles River Laboratories and to commit to paying for the lifetime sanctuary care of the 1,000 monkeys the company imported. Thank you for your consideration. May we please hear from you?

Sincerely,



Kathy Guillermo  
Senior Vice President  
Laboratory Investigations Department