



February 15, 2024

Roxanne Mullaney, D.V.M.  
Deputy Administrator  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Via e-mail: [Roxanne.C.Mullaney@usda.gov](mailto:Roxanne.C.Mullaney@usda.gov)

Dear Dr. Mullaney:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) immediately investigate whistleblower allegations concerning monkeys imported by Bluebird Nordic (Bluebird; USDA Certificate No. 10-T-0024) for Charles River Laboratories Inc. (Charles River; USDA Certificate No. 14-B-0013).

PETA received anonymous whistleblower allegations concerning a shipment of monkeys from Vietnam to Houston on January 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>. Bluebird transported the monkeys on a flight (tail number TF-BBQ) that had five layovers and lasted approximately 40 hours. An airline whistleblower reported that transport trucks had to wait hours for the flight to arrive, as it was delayed in transit and arrived several hours behind schedule. One of the people who handled the flight upon arrival in Houston said that—even from a distance—the crates of monkeys smelled awful, as if the monkeys had been living in them for several days.

Further whistleblower allegations about the condition of the monkeys include that many of the animals appeared to be in poor health, including low bodyweights of older animals and diarrhea issues.

Additionally, whistleblower reports suggest that the Vietnamese monkey farm from which the monkeys originated doesn't appear to have the capacity to send out large numbers (such as in this shipment) of captive-bred monkeys. They also suggest that Charles River leadership has visited the farm themselves and indicated concerns about the state of the farm and the provenance of the monkeys on site.

We urge the USDA to immediately investigate these whistleblower allegations because, if accurate, the monkeys were imported in violation of the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and the associated Animal Welfare Regulations (AWR). Since these animals would still be in quarantine at Charles River's Houston facility, please include in your investigation an urgent APHIS inspection at the facility, with particular attention given to these recently arrived monkeys.

If the whistleblower allegations are accurate in describing the condition of the monkeys upon arrival in Houston, Bluebird should have been aware of the situation, not transported them to Houston, and instead arranged for them to

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receive veterinary care. Under Section 3.90 of the AWR, it's the responsibility of the air transportation carrier to check on the animals and "determine whether any of the nonhuman primates is in obvious physical distress, and arrange for any needed veterinary care for the nonhuman primates as soon as possible." The section further states, "If a nonhuman primate is obviously ill, injured, or in physical distress, [he or she] must not be transported in commerce, except to receive veterinary care for the condition."

If the whistleblower allegations are accurate in describing the monkeys but Bluebird was unaware of their condition, such circumstances would suggest that the airline didn't perform required welfare observations. Section 3.90 of the AWR states the following:

During air transportation of nonhuman primates, it is the responsibility of the carrier to observe the nonhuman primates as frequently as circumstances allow, but not less than once every 4 hours if the animal cargo area is accessible during flight. If the animal cargo area is not accessible during flight, the carrier must observe the nonhuman primates whenever they are loaded and unloaded and whenever the animal cargo space is otherwise accessible to make sure that the nonhuman primates have sufficient air for normal breathing, that the ambient temperature is within the limits provided in § 3.88(d) of this subpart, and that all other applicable standards of this subpart are being complied with. The carrier must determine whether any of the nonhuman primates is in obvious physical distress, and arrange for any needed veterinary care for the nonhuman primates as soon as possible.

Additionally, we question whether adequate welfare observations could even be carried out at all the required times for a shipment containing hundreds of monkeys.

The likelihood that the monkeys weren't observed and were in alleged poor health—or were observed and their poor health was ignored—is particularly concerning given the significant increase in shipments from both Mauritius and Southeast Asia with confirmed tuberculosis (TB) cases among monkeys. In January 2023, 26 long-tailed macaques imported from Southeast Asia were found to be infected with *Mycobacterium orygis*, a bacterial strain causing TB that had never been seen in animals in the U.S. Monkeys taken from their forest homes in Mauritius entered the U.S. and were quarantined under rules formulated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—and then exited quarantine infected with TB. These animals were transported across the country and ultimately triggered [a reportable disease outbreak in Michigan](#) last year after laboratory workers were exposed to infected animals. Crowding immunocompromised monkeys from areas with known cases of TB into an aircraft for 35 hours amplifies the health risk not only for these monkeys but also for all other primates, including humans, they encounter during each step of shipment to laboratories.

Furthermore, concerns about the condition and origins of this shipment of monkeys are exacerbated because Charles River is currently under federal investigation for possible violations of primate-importation laws due to the company's importation of over 1,000 endangered long-tailed macaques who were allegedly illegally captured from the wild.

Moreover, this situation is deeply concerning given Charles Rivers' plan to build an enormous monkey facility in Brazoria County, Texas, that would be many times larger than its Houston facility, and thousands more monkeys would be flown into Texas.

In conclusion, we urge you to investigate the allegations immediately and perform an urgent inspection at Charles River's Houston facility. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



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