



July 10, 2025

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The Honorable Attorney General Bondi, Secretary Burgum and Attorneys Gonzalez and Stone,

We are writing to urge you to investigate reports we have received from multiple sources that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Department of the Interior are planning to return ownership of trafficked wildlife to the company that imported them, Charles River Laboratories. We are told this transaction is imminent, and we ask that you speedily prevent it, if you find this information is accurate. We further ask that DOJ reopen discussions with PETA regarding sanctuary placement of these monkeys.

We are also concerned by the current apparent business relationship between former Secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt—who oversaw FWS during much of the 2017-2022 federal investigation into suspected monkey laundering in Cambodia, which began under the first Trump administration—and Charles River which continues to conduct business with a DOJ indicted fugitive who remains at large.

The animals at issue are approximately 1,269 long-tailed macaques imported to the U.S. from Cambodia by Charles River Laboratories in five shipments in late 2022 and early 2023. FWS prohibited Charles River from using or selling the monkeys and essentially seized them in place in two of the company's facilities, citing their movement through a supply chain that the DOJ had identified as part of a criminal enterprise.

Entities:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

Charles River could not verify whether the monkeys were truly captive-bred, as claimed in their paperwork, or if they had been illegally captured from the wild and falsely labeled—a violation of both the Lacey and the Endangered Species Acts. Since early 2023, no shipments of monkeys from Cambodia have been allowed to enter the U.S.

This action followed the November 16, 2022, [announcement](#) that the U.S. Department of Justice indicted eight individuals in Cambodia as part of a monkey trafficking investigation, known as Operation Longtail Liberation. The investigation was carried out by FWS, Homeland Security, and the Internal Revenue Service. The defendants included senior Cambodian officials and international wildlife brokers: Omaliss Keo, Masphal Kry, James Lau, Dickson Lau, Sunny Chan, Raphael Cheung Man, Sarah Yeung, and Hing Ip Chung. All were charged with conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act and the Endangered Species Act. The central facility named in the indictment was Vanny Bioresource, located in Pursat Province, Cambodia.

Of the eight individuals indicted, only Masphal Kry was taken into custody—intercepted while transiting through JFK Airport in New York. The remaining seven individuals remain at large, with active federal warrants for their arrest.

In early 2023, Charles River [disclosed](#) that it was under investigation for its alleged role in the trafficking scheme. Charles River is now the defendant in a [class action suit](#) brought by investors. It is our understanding that the FWS investigation remains open. While Charles River halted its U.S. imports of monkeys from Cambodia, the company has sustained its profits by redirecting Cambodian-origin shipments to Canada.

Meanwhile, the 1,269 Cambodian-origin macaques at the center of this investigation remain confined at Charles River facilities in the U.S., even though PETA and Born Free USA, a prominent animal sanctuary, provided a solution in 2023 when we were contacted by representatives of FWS and the Department of Justice to discuss the possibility of a rescue. The detailed plan provided by Born Free offered placement options that would allow these animals to live out their lives in decent, spacious surroundings, and PETA pledged a million dollars toward their lifetime care—but Charles River, which would have profited from their importation and is at the center of the trafficking scandal, must be held responsible for covering the full cost of their lifelong support.

Multiple sources tell us that officials at FWS and the Department of the Interior are now considering a plan that would allow Charles River to retain custody of the monkeys by repurposing them as breeding stock. Their offspring—descended from animals caught up in a known trafficking operation—would then be labeled as “U.S. captive-bred,” effectively laundering the lineage and bypassing existing import restrictions. This would enable Charles River to profit from the crime. If this is true, it is a stunning miscarriage of justice and sets a dangerous precedent in the handling of smuggled wildlife.

Adding additional and troubling credence to the reports of quiet back channel negotiations is newly surfaced evidence that former U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt—who was a cabinet member from 2019 to 2021, during the time that multiple federal agencies were actively investigating the Charles River and the Cambodian primate trade—participated in site visits to three Cambodian breeding facilities, including Vanny Bioresource—the monkey supplier at the heart of the U.S. federal investigation—as well as suppliers Orient Cam, and KF Farms as part of

a Charles River delegation with [Kevin McNelly, Charles River's Vice President](#) of Global Strategic Programs. [Photos taken](#) during the March 2025 visit show Bernhardt and McNelly at these facilities, including Vanny Bioresearch, on the same day that DOJ-indicted fugitive, Hing Ip Chung, the general manager of Vanny BioResearch--- was also present.

Given the current allegations about the imminent release of the monkeys to Charles River, Bernhardt's appearance at the facility with a U.S. fugitive still under indictment raises questions about whether he may have used his prior agency connections to reestablish access to a blocked supply chain. A former cabinet official doing business with a Charles River executive and a monkey exporter wanted for federal crimes in the U.S. undermines the ability of authorities to enforce trafficking laws and impacts the prosecutions of wildlife smuggling cases.



Figure 1. Former U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt and Kevin McNelly, CRL Corporate Vice President of Global Strategic Programs touring KF Farm in Cambodia with officials from the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. [Photos](#) published March 22, 2025 on the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website.



Figure 2. Meeting at Orient CamBio, in Center from left on gray couch: Kevin McNelly (Dark shirt and blue pants) and David Bernhardt (white shirt and khaki pants). [Photos](#) published March 22, 2025 on the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website.



Figure 3. Pictured from left: Yong Hong Zhang (Vanny Bioresearch (VBRC) Farm Manager in Pursat), Thomas Liu (VBRC Phnom Pehn), and Hing Ip Chung (VBRC General Manager Pursat). Chung was indicted in November 2022 and is a fugitive from justice. [Photos](#) published March 22, 2025 on the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website.





*Figure 4. Former Interior Secretary David Bernhardt photographed at Cambodia's Vanny BioResearch Farm in March 2025—the same site and day that DOJ-indicted fugitive Hing Ip Chung was present. [Photos](#) published March 22, 2025 on the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website.*

We respectfully request the Department of Justice to take immediate action to prevent the transfer of ownership of these abused macaques to Charles River and to ensure that prior enforcement decisions are not quietly reversed through backchannel arrangements. The company should not be allowed to fatten its wallet by exploiting the victims of the smuggling scheme. Rather, it should be compelled to pay for the lifetime care of the 1,269 animals who, through no fault of their own, have existed in cages for two years, denied all that gives their lives meaning. The offer from PETA and Born Free USA to place the monkeys in sanctuary remains open.

Sincerely,

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cc: Ricky J. Patel, Special Agent, Homeland Security Investigations, Newark, N.J., Field Office