

April 16, 2026

Eliav Barr, M.D.
Head, Global Clinical Development and Chief Medical Officer
Merck & Co., Inc.

Via e-mail: Eliav_barr@merck.com

Dear Dr. Barr:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which has more than 10.4 million members and supporters worldwide, regarding serious concerns about the New Iberia Research Center (NIRC) at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, which your company has used as a contract research organization. Newly obtained whistleblower footage, together with federal inspection findings, shows primates confined in filthy, poorly maintained conditions that violate basic animal welfare standards and raise serious questions about whether studies conducted at this facility could withstand regulatory scrutiny or comply with Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) regulations under 21 C.F.R. Part 58. Conditions of this kind also raise broader concerns about the stability and reliability of preclinical data generated using animals maintained at the facility.

NIRC confines more than 12,000 primates, including rhesus macaques, long-tailed macaques, pig-tailed macaques, African green monkeys, and chimpanzees. As the largest primate research facility in the United States, the scale of NIRC's operation carries heightened responsibilities for disease control, veterinary oversight, husbandry, and environmental management. Entities that fund research at, collaborate with, or procure primates from this facility necessarily rely on assurances that animals are clinically stable, appropriately housed, and maintained under conditions consistent with producing scientifically valid and reliable data. As a company that has partnered with NIRC in the past, your organization has a direct interest in whether those conditions are being met. We urge you to consider the information detailed below.

Conditions Documented in Recent Video Footage

PETA recently received video [footage](#) filmed earlier this year from insiders at NIRC. Although recorded in low light, the footage clearly shows room after room of monkeys, confined alone in steel cages barely larger than their bodies, with waste pans beneath the cages containing accumulated feces and uneaten food. The video also documents dilapidated conditions, including cage pans propped up with overturned buckets, pooled liquid covering much of the floor in one room, peeling floor paint, and multiple monkeys exhibiting hair loss on their

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arms and legs. Monkeys appear to be confined in barren cages with little more than single strands of plastic beads hung outside the cage and, occasionally, a worn Kong toy inside. The presence of pooled liquid, accumulated waste beneath cages, and deteriorating facility surfaces raises concerns about sanitation and environmental control, factors that are fundamental to maintaining study integrity in regulated research environments.

Research involving primates assumes that animals are clinically healthy, physiologically stable, and maintained under controlled environmental conditions. The conditions documented in this footage, including accumulated waste, inadequate enrichment, and apparently prolonged isolation, are inconsistent with those assumptions and with the environmental management and husbandry controls expected in facilities conducting regulated research.

Documented Environmental and Animal Care Failures

The conditions shown in the footage are consistent with a broader pattern of operational failures at NIRC documented in federal inspection reports over multiple years. These records describe repeated deficiencies in environmental control, veterinary oversight, housing systems, and internal compliance processes. In a U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) [inspection report](#) dated June 10, 2025, NIRC received a critical violation after 19 rhesus macaques died between January 21 and January 23, 2025, during a period when outdoor temperatures fell as low as 2°F. The USDA determined that the monkeys were not acclimated to such temperatures and that outdoor housing did not provide adequate shelter from wind and cold. The USDA further reported that subsequent necropsies revealed that many of the monkeys who died had underlying medical conditions. These animals were not experimental subjects but rather part of the general colony, animals who should have been medically screened, closely monitored, and protected from environmental exposure risks. This finding raises a fundamental concern: either NIRC failed to detect widespread medical vulnerability within its colony, or it exposed medically vulnerable animals to freezing conditions despite those risks. Either scenario reflects a breakdown in veterinary oversight incompatible with the standards expected of a federally regulated research facility. Over the past decade, USDA enforcement actions have included civil penalties totaling over \$158,000 related to unsafe housing conditions, containment failures, delayed detection of animal deaths, and breakdowns in internal oversight mechanisms.

Internal Records Reflect Downstream Acceptance of Compromised Animals

Documents obtained through a public records request provide insight into how animals from NIRC are evaluated and cleared for research use once they enter the study assignment process. Internal communications among NIRC, Charles River Laboratories, and a pharmaceutical company indicate that monkeys exhibiting injury, illness, or signs of physiological or psychological compromise are accepted for research use and moved through the supply chain. These records raise concerns that acceptance criteria may permit the inclusion of animals with pre-existing conditions. This points to a system-wide issue rather than an isolated lapse, with compromised animals normalized at entry into the research pipeline.

Implications for Research Conduct and Reliability

Even when studies are not conducted under formal GLP protocols, preclinical research relies on the assumption that animals are clinically healthy, physiologically stable, and maintained under conditions that do not introduce uncontrolled biological stressors or pathogen exposure. When

those conditions are not met, environmental stress, disease, and physiological instability can alter immune responses, metabolism, and behavior—introducing variability that complicates the interpretation of experimental findings and may ultimately affect downstream research and development decisions.

In light of the documented conditions and regulatory findings described above, we encourage your company to review any current or past work conducted at NIRC, or involving animals supplied by this facility, and assess whether these issues warrant further evaluation. Additional supporting documentation referenced above is available upon request.

Sincerely,



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