



April 11, 2026

Minnesota Board of Veterinary Medicine
335 Randolph Avenue, Suite 215
St. Paul, MN 55102

Via e-mail: vet.med@state.mn.us

Dear Members of the Board:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals to request that the Minnesota Board of Veterinary Medicine investigate apparent failures by Dr. Nathan Koewler, attending veterinarian at the University of Minnesota (UMN), to meet minimum standards of veterinary practice.

PETA has received disturbing reports from insiders at UMN alleging that monkeys used in the university's laboratories have suffered as a result of inadequate veterinary oversight and substandard surgical care. According to these reports, several experimenters perform invasive brain surgeries on monkeys in which an incision is made in the scalp, a hole is drilled into the skull, and hardware, including recording chambers and headposts, is implanted. Several of these experimenters—most notably Geoffrey Ghose and Jan Zimmermann, professors in UMN's Department of Neuroscience who are neither veterinarians nor surgeons—have botched surgeries on multiple monkeys, causing pain and suffering beyond that inherent to the approved procedures.

As UMN's attending veterinarian, Dr. Koewler is responsible for overseeing the animal care program and reviewing and approving operating procedures affecting animal welfare—including ensuring that personnel who use animals in experiments are qualified to perform their duties. He also serves on UMN's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), the federally mandated body responsible for reviewing proposed animal use in experimentation, ensuring compliance with animal welfare requirements, minimizing pain and distress, and addressing concerns regarding the humane treatment of animals. The IACUC is the last line of defense for animals used in laboratories. Based on insider reports provided to PETA and federal findings documenting violations of animal welfare regulations and guidelines at UMN, Dr. Koewler appears to have repeatedly failed to meet his professional obligations under applicable state and federal standards. These responsibilities include ensuring adequate veterinary care, preventing unnecessary pain and distress, and intervening when experimental procedures result in complications affecting animal welfare.

As attending veterinarian, Dr. Koewler bears primary responsibility for ensuring that animals experiencing post-surgical complications receive timely diagnosis, treatment, and, when necessary, removal from experimental use.

The experience of a rhesus macaque named Everett (born July 15, 2018) illustrates the consequences of these failures of veterinary oversight. During a

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November 1, 2022, surgery to implant cranial hardware, approximately 20 screws reportedly penetrated Everett's brain tissue—some as deep as 4 mm—an outcome inconsistent with standard implant procedures and associated with risks of infection, neurological injury, and significant pain and distress. In the weeks that followed, Everett reportedly displayed numerous signs consistent with neurological compromise and suffering, including lethargy, arm weakness suggestive of hemiparesis, head pressing against cage surfaces (suggesting a severe headache), vomiting, gaze-evoked nystagmus, worsening alopecia, pacing, and violent head shaking. Despite these persistent warning signs, there is no indication that timely corrective veterinary intervention was provided. As the attending veterinarian responsible for overseeing the institution's animal care program, Dr. Koewler had a duty to ensure prompt evaluation and treatment of such complications.

Similar concerns arise regarding the treatment of a rhesus macaque named Bilbo (born May 1, 2016). After complications during cranial implant procedures, Bilbo later developed an infection affecting the implanted hardware. Although a university veterinarian recommended removal of both the headpost and the recording chamber due to concerns about compromised bone and tissue integrity, only partial corrective action was taken. On June 25, 2023, Bilbo's recording chamber subsequently detached, leaving his brain exposed. Rather than ensuring immediate surgical intervention to protect the exposed tissue, Dr. Koewler reportedly delayed corrective surgery for approximately **three days**. Allowing an animal to remain in this condition without prompt treatment fell well below accepted standards of veterinary care and exposed the animal to preventable risk of infection, trauma, and prolonged suffering.

Insiders further report repeated surgical complications affecting additional monkeys used in the same research program, including implants that failed, excessively prolonged procedures, preventable repeat surgeries, and infections associated with cranial hardware. In one instance, a monkey's headpost detached during routine handling, requiring emergency closure surgery; in another, a surgical instrument penetrated deeply into brain tissue during implant placement. These incidents were not isolated events but part of a broader pattern of complications that reasonably required timely intervention by the attending veterinarian responsible for oversight of the institution's animal care program to prevent recurrence and ensure appropriate standards of care. The persistence of these conditions indicates a failure to exercise the level of oversight expected of a veterinarian responsible for the welfare of animals used throughout an institutional research program.

The federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) does not insulate Dr. Koewler or UMN from liability under state law, as it expressly does not preempt state regulation of veterinary practice or animal protection. State oversight is particularly important here because the AWA establishes only minimal welfare standards, and even those standards have repeatedly been found by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Inspector General to be inadequately enforced. We respectfully urge your department to conduct a thorough investigation into the concerns detailed in this complaint and, if substantiated, to take appropriate enforcement action, including citing Dr. Koewler for violations of the Code of Professional Conduct for veterinarians. I would be pleased to provide any additional information or assistance that may aid your office in its review and investigation into these concerns.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alka Chandna". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Alka Chandna, Ph.D.

Vice President

Laboratory Oversight & Special Cases

Laboratory Investigations Department