



April 11, 2026

Rebecca Cunningham, M.D.
President
University of Minnesota

Via e-mail: durkin@umn.edu

Dear President Cunningham:

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our 10.4 million members and supporters, including more than 79,000 in Minnesota, regarding deeply troubling information provided by insiders about the treatment of macaque monkeys in laboratories at the University of Minnesota (UMN). The allegations concern experiments conducted by neuroscience professors Geoff Ghose and Jan Zimmermann and reveal a pattern of invasive procedures, apparent surgical incompetence, repeated complications, and a disturbing failure of meaningful institutional oversight.

According to the information shared with us, monkeys in these laboratories are subjected to craniotomies—procedures that involve cutting into the scalp, removing part of the skull, affixing headposts and cranial recording chambers to the skull, and implanting electrodes into the brain. After these surgeries, the monkeys are repeatedly restrained and forced to perform visual or behavioral tasks while neural activity is recorded. In some experiments, the visual development of infant monkeys was deliberately disrupted before they underwent these surgeries. Other monkeys were implanted with vascular ports, injected with neural tracers, or subjected to forced drug-administration paradigms. Ultimately, the monkeys are killed.

As these experimenters should know, craniotomies inherently carry a significant risk of infection because they breach the scalp and skull and leave permanent hardware protruding through the skin. Infection can inflame and degrade surrounding tissue and bone, weakening the stability of headposts and chambers so that they loosen, shift, or even detach—necessitating additional interventions and compounding suffering. The insiders' accounts indicate that these issues were not adequately handled and that infections and hardware failures have been disturbingly common in these laboratories, causing significant suffering.

The plight of a rhesus macaque named Everett illustrates the severity of these concerns. In November 2022, Zimmermann reportedly implanted a headpost and recording chamber using an excessive number of screws, approximately 20 of which protruded into brain tissue, some as deep as 4 millimeters. Over the following weeks, Everett exhibited lethargy, arm weakness suggestive of hemiparesis (weakness and decreased ability to control movement on one side of the body), repeated head pressing against cage surfaces (a likely sign of severe headache), vomiting, abnormal eye movements, worsening hair loss, and violent head shaking. Despite these serious symptoms, meaningful intervention appears

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to have been delayed *for months*. The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) ultimately deemed Everett unfit for continued experimentation, and he was euthanized, but only after prolonged and avoidable suffering.

What happened to a rhesus macaque named Bilbo is similarly alarming. During a corrective surgery in November 2022, a surgical tool penetrated approximately two *centimeters* into his brain. His heart rate spiked, he slipped out of the stereotaxic device meant to immobilize him during surgery, and a metal bar on the device pushed into his eye, injuring it.

Other monkeys, including Gandalf, Elrond, and Ponyo, suffered hardware failures, prolonged surgeries lasting more than *14 hours*, severe infections including MRSA, and repeated invasive procedures. In several instances, veterinarians raised concerns, yet corrective action appears to have been limited to minor record-keeping recommendations or voluntary suspensions.

UMN has acknowledged problems. In 2023, Ghose was temporarily prohibited from experimenting on monkeys, and more recently, after PETA met with local law enforcement authorities, he was stripped of the privilege of running his own laboratory. Yet he is reportedly still permitted to conduct experiments on monkeys in other laboratories. Zimmermann is also permitted to experiment on and harm primates. Incremental adjustments have failed to prevent extreme suffering.

President Cunningham, allowing repeated surgical failures, infections, hardware detachments, and prolonged distress to continue under the banner of academic research, harms animals, exposes the university to reputational harm, and reflects a profound failure of ethical stewardship. **We urge you to permanently bar Geoff Ghose and Jan Zimmermann from experimenting on monkeys and to initiate a comprehensive review of UMN's primate research program with the goal of phasing out invasive monkey experimentation in favor of state-of-the-art, humane, and human-relevant science.**

Universities across the country and around the world are increasingly embracing organs-on-chips, organoids, advanced imaging techniques, AI, and other cutting-edge approaches that are more directly applicable to human biology and do not entail prolonged confinement and repeated brain surgeries on sentient, socially complex primates—and funding from the National Institutes of Health and private philanthropists mirrors this shift. UMN can and should lead in this transition.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. Will you meet with our neuroscientists and primate scientists to discuss these concerns?

Sincerely,



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cc: Danielle Rintala, Director, Research Integrity and Compliance