



October 9, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The global authority charged with policing the international trade in threatened and endangered wildlife, CITES, has just issued a damning new assessment of Cambodia's monkey trade concluding that exporters have failed to fulfill requirements by CITES to ensure that monkeys aren't be illegally captured and exported for use in laboratories in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Given these distressing findings by CITES, as well as the potential for the introduction of dangerous zoonotic pathogens commonly carried by long tailed macaques, we urge you to suspend the importation of monkeys from Cambodia to the United States.

The United States has seen the consequences of Cambodia's illicit monkey trade before. A five-year U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) investigation, begun in 2017, exposed a monkey laundering operation that moved more than 30,000 wild-caught monkeys into the U.S. under false "captive-bred" claims. Cambodian monkey exporters were trapping monkeys from the wild, falsely labeling them as monkeys bred on farms, and selling them to U.S. importers. This is a violation of both U.S. and international law.

After the Justice Department indicted eight people in a Cambodia monkey-smuggling scheme, imports of monkeys into the U.S. from Cambodia then effectively stopped for nearly three years. In late 2024, after reviewing the USFWS evidence, CITES opened its own review, and in June 2025 inspected Cambodia's major breeding farms. CITES identified serious problems and required changes both in government oversight and in the breeding facilities themselves, including how monkeys were sourced. Those findings and required reforms were published by CITES in November 2025. Yet U.S. importers resumed shipments from Cambodia that same month, before the Cambodian government or the commercial breeding system it oversees had demonstrated that those problems had been corrected. In just the past 11 months, 3,340 monkeys have been brought into the U.S. from Cambodia.

The CITES Secretariat now reports that, after years of scrutiny, it still "cannot confirm or rule out the occurrence of fraud or corruption" in Cambodia's monkey

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trade. Cambodia is still capturing wild long-tailed macaques and putting them on breeding farms, still has not conducted the population assessment required to determine whether those removals are threatening the wild populations, and still cannot provide all of the documentation needed to verify that monkeys are being legally exported.

Cambodia's creative interpretation of the requirements is that monkeys roaming freely around cities and temples are somehow not "wild," and therefore can be captured and funneled into commercial breeding farms. CITES authorities have repeatedly and flatly rejected this interpretation, yet Cambodian exporters continue to put these wild monkeys and their offspring into the supply chain that sends these animals to the U.S.

And Cambodia has already exported more than questionable paperwork. Monkeys imported from Cambodia have arrived carrying *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, the Tier 1 Select Agent that causes potentially deadly melioidosis, an infection that can and has remain hidden for months or years in apparently healthy animals, including beyond the mandated CDC quarantine period. Imported monkeys are also known to carry tuberculosis, shigella, herpes B, malaria and other serious zoonotic diseases, which is precisely why HHS regulates and quarantines them in the first place.

You have already indicated that you want to end this dangerous dependence on imported monkeys, and members of Congress who are deeply concerned by the disease risk are with you. The newly introduced bipartisan PRIMATE Act would ban the importation of monkeys to the U.S. for use in laboratories. Will you lead the way by suspending monkey importation from Cambodia?

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Guillermo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathy" and last name "Guillermo" clearly legible.

Kathy Guillermo
Senior Vice President
PETA