



October 14, 2026

Rebecca Cunningham, M.D.
President
University of Minnesota

Sent via email

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, to urge your immediate intervention in monkey experiments conducted by Jan Zimmermann at the University of Minnesota (UMN). A preprint released in September 2025 describes experiments in which monkeys in Zimmermann's laboratory were subjected to repeated cocaine infusions, forced abstinence, and renewed drug exposure. We urge you to prohibit Zimmermann from conducting further experiments on monkeys and to arrange for the surviving monkeys' retirement to reputable sanctuaries.

Months of Cocaine Exposure and Confinement

The monkeys in Zimmermann's laboratory were held alone in metal cages, deprived of the companionship and physical contact essential to the well-being of these highly social animals. Extensive research has documented the damaging effects of such isolation on both psychological and physical health. They had metal braces—euphemistically referred to as “collars”—fastened around their necks, then were forcibly moved from their cages to restraint chairs using a pole attached to the brace to control their movements. They underwent surgery to implant ports beneath their skin connected to a large vein, allowing cocaine to be delivered directly into their bloodstream.

Experimenters first deprived the monkeys of water and trained them to press a lever for juice, using their thirst to compel the trained response. They then replaced the juice with cocaine. For approximately three months, the animals were strapped into restraint chairs five days a week, receiving up to six cocaine infusions per session. Experimenters then abruptly cut off access to cocaine, subjecting the monkeys to 60 days of forced abstinence and withdrawal symptoms that included cravings, depression, agitation, and anxiety, before exposing them to the drug again. As part of this prolonged experiment, the monkeys underwent nine MRI scans, each time under sedation.

Zimmermann describes this procedure as “cocaine self-administration,” but the monkeys had no choice about participating. They did not choose water deprivation, confinement, surgical implants, restraint, or participation in an experiment designed to establish and sustain cocaine use. Experimenters imposed those conditions and determined when the drug would be available and when it would be withdrawn.

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

Washington
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Entities:

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

No Demonstrated Treatment Benefit

The stated aim of this experiment was to examine changes in brain activity and communication during cocaine use, abstinence, and re-exposure. The authors reported both shared and individual patterns in the monkeys' responses. But this experiment did not test an addiction treatment or demonstrate that these findings would improve prevention, treatment, or recovery for people with substance use disorders.

The prospect of additional observations about cocaine-exposed monkeys does not justify subjecting these animals to months of confinement and invasive procedures. Nor does labeling an experiment a model of human addiction establish that it captures the experiences of people struggling with that condition. Human substance-use disorders unfold within complex personal and social circumstances that cannot be reproduced by placing a monkey in a restraint chair and making cocaine available through a surgically implanted port.

UMN should direct its resources toward research grounded in human biology and experience, including brain imaging in consenting participants and clinical studies designed to improve prevention, treatment, and recovery. People affected by addiction deserve research with a clear path toward helping them. Monkeys deserve lives free from experiments that deliberately expose them to harmful drugs.

Please end these experiments and commit to retiring the surviving monkeys to reputable sanctuaries where they can receive appropriate care and opportunities for compatible companionship. We would welcome your written response outlining the steps the university will take.

Sincerely,



Alka Chandna, Ph.D.
Vice President
Laboratory Oversight & Special Cases
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
AlkaC@peta.org | (757) 803-6447