

NANCY MACE
1ST DISTRICT, SOUTH CAROLINA

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND ACCOUNTABILITY

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS



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November 12, 2024

The Honorable Monica M. Bertagnolli,
M.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Axel Wolff, MS, DVM
Acting Director
Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare
National Institutes of Health
6700B Rockledge Drive
Suite 2500, MSC 6910
Bethesda, MD 20892

Sarah Helming
Deputy Administrator, Animal Care
U.S. Department of Agriculture
4700 River Road, Unit 97
Riverdale, MD 20737

Dear Director Bertagnolli, Deputy Administrator Helming and Dr. Wolff:

We are writing with urgent concerns regarding federal oversight of Alpha Genesis, a company which manages a nonhuman primate breeding and experimentation laboratory located in my Congressional district. By now, you are likely aware at least 43 monkeys escaped from Alpha Genesis's laboratory in Yemassee, South Carolina on November 6th.¹ A week later, some of these monkeys remain at large, placing the animals and my constituents at risk.

Federal reports indicate Alpha Genesis's laboratories confined a total of 6,701 primates as of May 2024.² In addition to breeding monkeys, we are deeply concerned in 2023 Alpha Genesis used 449 primates in research, including painful experimentation. The company also manages the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) controversial Monkey Island in Beaufort County, which holds an additional 3,300 primates in my district. The contract states Alpha Genesis is expected to "...produce a minimum of 500 animals per year for the Governments use."³ Records show these primates are shipped to taxpayer-funded laboratories at the NIH, Food and Drug Administration

¹ https://www.postandcourier.com/beaufort-county/news/yemassee-monkeys-escape-alpha-genesis-south-carolina/article_5b4dcc40-9cb2-11ef-9595-57948042780d.html

² https://aphis.file.force.com/sfc/dist/version/download/?oid=00Dt0000000GyZH&ids=0683d00000EBXYo&d=%2Fa%2F3d0000035xYZ%2FHoSevhtwqcex.6l3_QG1P1GKREOGNs50_El8fLCPs4&asPdf=false

³ <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2023-2028-Alpha-Genesis-Monkey-Island-Contract-WCW.pdf>

and other agencies and subjected to painful and deadly experiments involving dangerous pathogens and invasive procedures.

Since 2008, Alpha Genesis has received over \$110 million in taxpayer funds through contracts and subcontracts from the Department of Health and Human Services, Small Business Administration, Department of Defense, and Department of Agriculture.^{4,5} This year alone, the company received \$19 million from the NIH to breed, confine and experiment on primates at its facilities in South Carolina.⁶

Given the significant expenditure of taxpayer funds, federal oversight by your agencies over the practices of Alpha Genesis is paramount. Unfortunately, the escape of 43 monkeys last week is far from the first dangerous animal escape from Alpha Genesis. Reports indicate Alpha Genesis has a long history of monkey escapes and other violations of federal animal welfare laws.⁷ As recently as September 2022, federal inspectors cited Alpha Genesis for “critical” violations of the Animal Welfare Act related to inadequate oversight, substandard housing, and primate escapes resulting in injuries and deaths.⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors wrote:

- ***“Six separate incidents of animals opening or escaping from their primary enclosures were documented between January and August of 2022. Two groups of animals (7 animals and 4 animals) escaped through weaknesses in the chain link fences of their primary enclosure but remained contained within the perimeter fence. Three groups (2 animals each) opened the panels between their cages and had direct, unplanned interaction, three of which required veterinary care. One additional animal escaped its primary enclosure and subsequently required veterinary care.”***
- ***“One animal was found dead from trauma caused by the resident animals in the enclosure. Four animals required subsequent veterinary care”***
- ***“An infant monkey became entangled in a stretch gauze material used in an enclosure to hold a water bottle in a clinic cage. The infant did not survive.”***
- ***“In two unrelated incidents in July 2022, two animals had digits become entrapped in structures inside their enclosures. Both animals were found dead in their enclosures with their fingers entrapped.”***

In January 2023, federal inspectors again cited Alpha Genesis for violations of the Animal Welfare Act due to dangerous and dirty primate enclosures.⁹

⁴ <https://www.usaspending.gov/search/?hash=108b6cf06a10f884826137f7d79d4bb1>

⁵ <https://www.usaspending.gov/search/?hash=108b6cf06a10f884826137f7d79d4bb1>

⁶ <https://www.usaspending.gov/search/?hash=46778525484dc45d1676a370580a1ac4>

⁷ https://www.postandcourier.com/beaufort-county/news/yemassee-monkeys-escape-alpha-genesis-south-carolina/article_5b4dcc40-9cb2-11ef-9595-57948042780d.html

⁸ <https://aphis-->

[c.na107.content.force.com/sfc/dist/version/download/?oid=00Dt0000000GyZH&ids=068t000000awYYz&d=%2Fa%2F3d000000pVEW%2F3DsFMhtMOn9ZoAHhDIQ2nm8g6znXBZmmlm1PxsZsCQY&asPdf=false](https://aphis--c.na107.content.force.com/sfc/dist/version/download/?oid=00Dt0000000GyZH&ids=068t000000awYYz&d=%2Fa%2F3d000000pVEW%2F3DsFMhtMOn9ZoAHhDIQ2nm8g6znXBZmmlm1PxsZsCQY&asPdf=false)

⁹ <https://aphis-->

[c.na107.content.force.com/sfc/dist/version/download/?oid=00Dt0000000GyZH&ids=0683d000007h41e&d=%2Fa%2F3d000000z7SG%2F0scblVQXIlwYTAPzQLqQAK0sMSxYfs82f2sJPEo9Wr8&asPdf=false](https://aphis--c.na107.content.force.com/sfc/dist/version/download/?oid=00Dt0000000GyZH&ids=0683d000007h41e&d=%2Fa%2F3d000000z7SG%2F0scblVQXIlwYTAPzQLqQAK0sMSxYfs82f2sJPEo9Wr8&asPdf=false)

These problems date back at least a decade. In 2014, more than two dozen monkeys escaped, prompting the U.S. Department of Agriculture to cite and fine Alpha Genesis for the same issue.¹⁰ While in the care of Alpha Genesis, monkeys have frozen to death, died of dehydration, and been killed by other distressed primates. In May of 2016, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) opened an investigation into this Alpha Genesis as part of a larger probe into the mistreatment of non-human primates.¹¹ In 2018, Alpha Genesis Research was fined for six violations, including yet another escape.¹²

USDA inspectors wrote in their April 2014 citation report of inadequate and dangerous primate enclosures, "The facility needs to make more careful observations that all animals are located where they are supposed to be."¹³ Unfortunately, even a decade later, this still isn't happening, placing animals' well-being and the public safety of South Carolinians at risk.

Both of your agencies have oversight and enforcement authority over Alpha Genesis. Alpha Genesis's history of violations of federal laws and policies raises serious concerns about the company's ability to comply with the law, as well as the effectiveness of USDA and NIH oversight. This situation is particularly alarming given that the company is responsible for the health, safety and well-being of over 10,000 primates and the prudent use of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

We ask you immediately brief our office on the status of all active contracts your agencies have with Alpha Genesis, the results of inspections conducted by your agencies of Alpha Genesis facilities, your communication with Alpha Genesis pertaining to the recent escape of 43 primates, and your plan for corrective action and increased federal oversight over Alpha Genesis.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress

¹⁰ https://www.postandcourier.com/news/south-carolina-animal-research-group-fined-after-monkey-mishaps/article_ee2f1a70-6f30-11e8-a807-03c4809eb338.html

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/28/primate-research-centers-investigation-monkey-abuse-peta>

¹² <https://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/untamed-lowcountry/article213087664.html>

¹³ https://aphis--c.na107.content.force.com/sfc/dist/version/download/?oid=00Dt0000000GyZH&ids=068t000000ERYZg&d=%2Fa%2F3d000000pVFF%2FXazKiZ2_Wt13LL_ranJMGr9m.eXn8.L4mf._xWyx7F0&asPdf=false