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Dr. Collins and Dr. Fineberg,

I applaud the National Institutes of Health for making the ethical decision to halt transfer of 186 chimpanzees from Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico to Southwest National Primate Research Center in Texas. I understand the chimps will reside in New Mexico, “pending an Institute of Medicine (IOM) in-depth analysis to reassess the scientific need for the continued use of chimpanzees to accelerate biomedical discoveries. During this time, the Alamogordo chimpanzees will not be used in invasive research.”

This is promising news, given that 1300 or so chimps are already warehoused in labs to undergo crash tests, radiation, heart transplants, drug experiments, and induced syphilis, HIV, hepatitis, cancer... The IOM may require two years to decide whether the Alamogordo chimps ultimately return to research or retire to sanctuary. I strongly urge the latter and hope that you give these animals a final reprieve.

The elder chimps spent most of their lives in seclusion, rotated from one invasive procedure to the next. “Breeders” watched their babies taken soon after birth. This is a very sad life for any animal. I am particularly upset to learn that biomedical researchers gripe about the financial liability of “surplus chimps” due to “over-breeding.” Even when chimps fail to produce clinical symptoms or data relevant to human diseases such as HIV/AIDS, they remain in labs — unable to form social bonds, parent, or express their natural joy, grief, humor, bravery and intelligence.

As biotechnology rapidly transforms — with breakthroughs in “high throughput” in vitro systems, bioinformatics, genomics, metabonomics...and so many more animal-free technologies — officials will need to retire animals from government subsidized projects. I am very optimistic about the NIH moratorium for Alamogordo chimpanzees and urge you to extend it into permanent retirement.

Thank you,