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By Theresa Defino

Controversy Flares Over Retirement Home for NIH's Chimpanzees at Alamogordo

Apparently responding to news reports and a letter from four U.S. senators, Patricia Brown, director of the NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW), said in a statement that she had determined that “transporting chimpanzees assessed by the facility veterinarian and the NIH Veterinary Panel to be significantly compromised by disease or exhibiting difficulty maintaining quality of life would be a violation” of the Animal Welfare Act and the Public Health Service policy. The Oct. 27 announcement on the OLAW website is headlined “Chimpanzees must remain in their current location and not be transported under certain conditions” and notes that the Alamogordo Primate Facility in New Mexico “is a government-owned, contractor-operated federal research facility, conducting non-invasive sample collection and observational behavioral studies.” The statement does not mention any context for the announcement.

However, a week earlier, Sens. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., Tom Udall, D-N.M., Martha McSally, R-Ariz., and Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., sent a letter to NIH Director Francis Collins asking that he “ensure compliance” with the CHIMP Act’s provisions on retirement and relocation. The Oct. 20 letter also “expressed particular concern for the 37 remaining chimpanzees” at the Alamogordo facility on the Holloman Air Force Base and requested responses to several questions, including a justification for why the primates had not been moved. Since NIH phased out invasive chimpanzee research five years ago, it has retired dozens to Chimp Haven, a sanctuary in Louisiana, where the senators and animal rights groups say the Alamogordo chimpanzees would enjoy appropriate care and a better life. However, *The New York Times* reported Oct. 6 that NIH was unwilling to revisit a September 2019 decision that the chimpanzees were too frail to relocate; local news media, including television stations, have also picked up the story.

[Link to OLAW statement](#)

[Link to senators’ letter](#)

[Link to *The New York Times* story](#)

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