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Primatological
Society



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The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
U.S. Senate
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

June 10, 2024

Dear Senator Blumenthal,

The International Primatological Society fully supports the passage of the Captive Primate Safety Act (CPSA of 2024). Pet ownership of primates not only causes psychological and physical trauma to nonhuman primates but is a danger to the public. We are a nonprofit organization that encourages scientific research in all areas of study of nonhuman primates (hereafter "primates"), facilitates international cooperation among researchers, and promotes primate conservation ([IPS](https://www.internationalprimatologicalsociety.org)). Our membership consists of about 750 scientists affiliated with research facilities, universities, conservation organizations, and accredited zoos with expertise in primate welfare, biology, behavior, ecology, and conservation. The International Primatological Society has long opposed the holding of primates as pets as well as breeding and trading for these purposes.

The Captive Primate Safety Act strengthens existing laws and closes loopholes by prohibiting the possession of primates by private individuals, which supports and drives unethical breeding (that outside of a scientifically managed breeding program), interstate trade, and wildlife trafficking of primates in the United States. Primates are highly intelligent wild animals with complex emotional, social, and physical needs and capabilities. Young primates in private ownership are commonly removed from their mothers as infants, preventing the opportunity for necessary and appropriate social and physical development, and damaging their welfare (Freeman & Ross, 2014; Kaufmann & Rosenblum, 1969; Shannon et al., 1998; Soulsbury et al., 2009). As adults, primates may become extremely powerful, unpredictable, and unmanageable, often resulting in social isolation and placement in substandard housing that further compromises their wellbeing. Pet primates also pose substantial risks to public health and safety by physically attacking people. Attacks on owners, bystanders, or members of the public visiting attractions that allow public contact with primates are common and result in serious injury or even death. In addition, because primates are genetically similar to humans, many primate species

are susceptible to diseases that afflict humans, and the transmission of infection can occur in both directions. Diseases that can be transmitted include Ebola, tuberculosis, and Herpes B. Owners of these primates, children, elderly, as well as others the animals contact, are at risk.

National legislation is necessary as laws in many states are inadequate to protect primates or the public (Norconk et al., 2024). For example, Alabama and Delaware have no restrictions on the possession of primates. Arizona prohibits some primates, but not the ones most frequently found in the pet trade. Connecticut permits the ownership of primates that weigh less than 35 pounds if they were owned before October 2010. California restricts the private ownership of all primates. With this patchwork of legislation, there is no way to efficiently track and regulate, placing undue burden on local and national agencies and offices responsible for public health and safety, wildlife management, and animal control.

The rise of the internet facilitating global connection and social media may be changing public perceptions of private ownership of exotic animals (Moloney et al., 2021) and has resulted in a significant increase in the sales of wild animals. A recent study found that at least 550 primates, mostly infants, were sold on exotic animal websites in a single year (Seaboch & Cahoon, 2021). It was recently estimated that as many as 15,000 primates are kept as pets in the United States (Born Free, 2021). However, the unknown scope and scale of trade of pet primates draws additional attention to the substantial welfare challenges associated with the lack of licensing, oversight, and regulation of a species that is highly regulated when in the care of trained, educated professionals. The pet trade also fuels wildlife trafficking, which is harmful to wild populations of primates, and about 70% of primate species are threatened with extinction (IUCN, 2023). Although people involved in the primate pet trade may argue that captive breeding is important for species survival, breeding within the pet trade does not contribute to this cause.

In sum, The Captive Primate Safety Act would safeguard primate welfare, wild populations, and human safety. Members of the International Primatological Society are available to speak with interested legislators and testify in support of the bill. We look forward to using our expertise and working with you for the passage of the Captive Primate Safety Act.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonah Ratsimbazafy', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jonah Ratsimbazafy

President

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