

H.R. 1329 - The Captive Primate Safety Act

The Captive Primate Safety Act, introduced in the House of Representatives by Representatives Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) and Rob Simmons (R-CT) as **H.R. 1329**, prohibits interstate commerce in nonhuman primates for the pet trade. Keeping primates as pets poses serious risks to both people and the animals.

The attack on a California man by chimpanzees who escaped their confinement is only the latest example of how dangerous these animals can be. Nonhuman primates can cause injury and spread life-threatening disease. Because of the health risks, importing nonhuman primates to the United States for the pet trade has been banned by federal regulation since 1975. Still, an estimated 15,000 nonhuman primates are in private hands in the U.S., and there is a vigorous trade in these animals. Because there is only a patchwork of state laws prohibiting primates as pets and many of these animals move in interstate commerce, federal legislation is needed.

The Captive Primate Safety Act: H.R. 1329 amends the Lacey Act. It adds monkeys, apes, and other nonhuman primates to the list of animals who cannot be transported across state lines for the pet trade, like the Captive Wildlife Safety Act did for lions, tigers, and other big cats.

No impact on federally licensed facilities: H.R. 1329 has been narrowly crafted. It will not affect trade or transportation of animals for zoos, research facilities, universities, or accredited wildlife sanctuaries.

Dangerous behavior: Infant primates may seem cute and cooperative, but they inevitably grow larger, stronger, and more aggressive. They may become many times stronger than humans and extremely difficult to handle. They can inflict serious harm by biting and scratching. Removing their teeth, as many pet owners do, is cruel and no safeguard against injury. About 100 people have been injured by nonhuman primates over the past ten years – including 29 children – while many more incidents may have occurred but gone unreported.

Disease threat: Nonhuman primates can spread diseases that pose serious health risks to humans, including: Herpes B, monkeypox, Salmonella, Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV), tuberculosis, yellow fever, and the Ebola and Marburg viruses. Most macaque monkeys naturally carry the deadly Herpes B virus, for example.

Animal welfare concerns: Nonhuman primates require a specialized diet, companionship of other nonhuman primates, and housing in very large enclosures – needs the average pet owner cannot meet. A chimpanzee who becomes too difficult to handle at age eight might live another 50 years. There are few options to place these animals. Zoos will not take them, and reputable sanctuaries are near capacity. They may end up confined to small cages, sold to substandard roadside menageries, or back in the cycle of breeding and adding to the exotic animal trade.

Support of zoos and other organizations: The American Zoo and Aquarium Association and more than 40 other organizations have joined The Humane Society of the United States in urging Congress to pass the Captive Primate Safety Act.