



June 22, 2020

Dear Donny,

I am writing in response to your post of June 11th, on behalf of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and Humane Society International (HSI) in my capacity as, respectively, Vice President of Animal Research Issues and Director of Second Chance Chimpanzee Refuge Liberia (SCCRL).

First, I must thank you for your support of chimpanzees whom you perceive need help. We wish more people felt so strongly about animal protection. However, I was disappointed that in your post of June 11, you completely omitted the facts I had provided, correcting the misinformation being spread about Project Chimps sanctuary—a sanctuary designed to give chimpanzees who have been living in laboratories a better life. I had even suggested that you visit the sanctuary to see the chimpanzees' care directly.

As Project Chimps has shared with the HSUS and others, multiple reputable, independent veterinarians, accrediting bodies and government inspectors have visited Project Chimps, have inspected and assessed the facilities, program and animals there, and have concluded that the chimpanzees are receiving excellent care. (See reports at projectchimps.org/reports.)

Project Chimps invited the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries to provide an objective, outside assessment of its sanctuary. That assessment confirmed that claims alleging mistreatment of chimpanzees are unfounded and misleading. As part of the GFAS assessment, one of the most well-respected and experienced chimpanzee veterinarians in the world did an assessment of each chimpanzee in April, and she found that every chimpanzee was healthy and well cared for.

These assessments support HSUS's confidence in the sanctuary's work.

While GFAS did provide some recommendations, they were predominantly administrative—for example, adding a cover sheet to the animals' medical files and formalizing specific procedures in written SOPs. Other recommendations simply confirmed the need for actions that Project Chimps had already budgeted for and was in the process of performing before the GFAS review, such as adding lower platforms to the chimpanzees' climbing equipment. GFAS requires that sanctuaries they accredit uphold their Standards of Excellence and Project Chimps remained accredited during and after the GFAS assessment.



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The HSUS continues to provide support to Project Chimps because we know that this group of dedicated, experienced and empathetic professionals work tirelessly to ensure the chimpanzees' comfort and wellbeing. From having daily access to an outdoor enclosure and regular access to a multi-acre outside habitat, engaging enrichments, daily fresh and varied meals and snacks, the chimpanzees live at a sanctuary that operates with their happiness and interests in mind. The committed staff go above and beyond when it comes to ensuring a rewarding life for these chimpanzees, providing personal touches such as hiding treats inside mock termite mounds that mimic where the chimpanzees' wild ancestors would forage or providing their favorite frozen fruit on warm days, and ensuring chimpanzees have access to their favorite toys. [A video about the day in the life](#) of a Project Chimps caregiver, which includes feeding and enrichment time, was just released and demonstrates this approach and dedication.

Thanks to my role as a Project Chimps board member, I am aware there was a period when, due to construction efforts specifically to make space for more chimpanzees to be retired from laboratories, 14 chimpanzees living in one villa were not able to access the multi-acre outdoor habitat. There were some construction delays due to the rainiest months on record. But even during that period, we confirmed that the chimpanzees had access to an outside enclosure every day that included climbing structures, resting platforms, fresh air, sunshine and enrichment.

Since you have published incorrect details about legal action by Project Chimps, I'll remind you of what we shared in our previous letter: Project Chimps is an independent, autonomous sanctuary. While HSUS provides financial and administrative support, decisions made by the Project Chimps board of directors—such as legal actions the board opts to take—are conducted independently of the HSUS. While some of the people on Project Chimps' board are HSUS staff members like myself, when it comes to decisions made as Project Chimps board members, we are acting only in that capacity, doing what we think best for the sanctuary and animals there.

Again thanks to my role as a Project Chimps board member, I know that the sanctuary brought legal actions against two of its former employees—again, not HSUS employees—because it found they were continuously misleading the public with false information, despite multiple attempts to share evidence demonstrating their concerns to be unwarranted. However, let me reiterate, the HSUS is not involved in this legal action; questions about it should be directed to Project Chimps.

Your claim that the HSUS is somehow working to kill stories in the media related to Project Chimps is blatantly false. The HSUS has proactively reached out to the



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reporters and offered to connect them with Project Chimps and provided information and resources to assist with their articles.

A reminder, also, that HSUS has always supported whistleblowers who are trying to advocate for animals. For years we have actively and successfully fought against legislation in several states that attempted to silence legitimate whistleblowers. In fact, my career in animal protection started 20 years ago when I was a whistleblower, documenting abuse of primates in a laboratory. However, we do not support actions that—regardless of intention—are misleading the public and undermining a sanctuary that has been repeatedly confirmed to be doing good work for chimpanzees.

Second Chance Chimpanzee Refuge Liberia (SCCRL at liberiachimps.org), unlike Project Chimps, is a sanctuary fully operated and controlled by the HSUS and HSI. We are proud of the success we've had in overcoming many challenges to provide top quality care for these abandoned chimpanzees.

You omitted a great many facts in your writing about this refuge. For example, the HSUS conducted a full campaign against the New York Blood Center, soon after a primatologist informed us that there were dozens of chimpanzees that the NYBC had used for research but who were then left to languish. We engaged with parties behind the scenes searching for a solution. When it became necessary to go public, [we were at the forefront of letting the world know about these chimpanzees](#), who were being kept alive by their unpaid but devoted caretakers in Liberia—many of whom are still taking care of the chimpanzees. HSUS rallied our supporters, worked with the media to raise awareness, and gave an initial grant to provide the emergency funds that were so desperately needed in order to ensure food was delivered to the chimpanzees' islands. While the work of other organizations and individual advocates was critical, [we are proud of the role we played in securing a safe future for the chimpanzees](#).

When no other organization stepped up to take over the care of these chimpanzees, HSUS agreed to. HSUS funded the refuge for the next 2 years without any promise of funds from the New York Blood Center. During that time, we invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in their care. However, these animals have never “belonged” to the HSUS. The chimpanzees are “owned” by the government of Liberia, which has simply granted HSUS permission to be the chimpanzees' caregivers.

While we have had a strong partnership with the government since we first started taking care of the chimpanzees, it wasn't until last year that the Liberian government and HSUS/HSI signed an agreement that recognizes HSUS and HSI as the official caregivers of the former laboratory chimpanzees. Our organization must get permission from the Liberian



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government to take actions such as building or modifying the islands. We are working with the government to secure a space for a new refuge office and veterinary clinic, and are also actively working towards planning the construction of appropriate facilities on the islands while taking into account the very challenging nature of constructing facilities on islands that are marshland and are currently occupied by the chimpanzees.

The complex nature of working in a foreign country and the lengthy process of becoming the official caretakers has caused delays in some of our plans for the refuge, but we have always ensured that the chimpanzees' physical and mental needs are met. Since we've taken over their care and increased their feeding from every other day (the status when we arrived) to now twice a day, the chimpanzees have thrived. They have put on weight, their hair health has improved, and their behavior shows a movement away from tense anxiety and toward that of a more relaxed and content population.

The chimpanzees at Second Chance lead as natural a life as you'll find at any chimpanzee sanctuary in the world due to the unique islands they call home. There are no cages and they have complete freedom to climb, socialize and interact with their natural environment. It also means that these chimpanzees face some of the risks their wild relatives face, including venomous snake bites. When one chimpanzee named Comfort was discovered to have such a bite, our veterinarian and care team took action to save her life. Comfort was housed in an enclosure during her treatment, which is standard practice for captive chimpanzees who are recovering from major medical procedures, so that veterinarians can closely observe and access them. She had constant access to blankets and bedding, enrichment and appropriate veterinary care. The enclosure was upgraded prior to Comfort's arrival, including cleaning, welding, masonry, painting and provision of flowing water.

Comfort initially responded well to the necessary two surgeries. She was under the care of our experienced chimpanzee veterinarian and there was someone watching over her 24 hours a day. However, Comfort began to decline a few weeks later and with great sadness, we made the very difficult decision to humanely euthanize this beloved chimpanzee. She was surrounded by caregivers who have known and loved her for many years. We had hoped for a better outcome, but we are grateful that Comfort, at 41 years old, had 14 years in retirement on her island home. Those years were filled with freedoms, friendships, and a natural environment she was never able to experience during her time in the laboratory.

You've also made false statements that we are not using funds received from the New York Blood Center to improve the care of the chimpanzees at Second Chance Refuge. That is definitely not the case. As mentioned previously we've increased feedings from every other day to twice a day.



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The towers that deliver constant fresh water to the chimpanzees have received extensive repairs and replacement work, which has cost over \$11,000. We built a new dock so that it is safer for staff when they travel twice a day by boat to the various islands to deliver food. That cost approximately \$18,000. It was also necessary to buy a new boat, four vehicles that would withstand the extremely rugged wear and tear of driving long distances on unpaved roads to gather food, at a total cost of \$125,000. All of these have obvious cost implications. The attached document provides information on daily operating costs, which are approximately \$565,000 per year. While we are grateful to have received \$6 million from the New York Blood Center, you can do the math and easily see that amount isn't nearly enough to care for these chimpanzees for the decades they are expected to live. Organizations involved in direct care must fundraise to ensure long-term success.

You also mentioned two previous consultants, Jim and Jenny Desmond, whom the HSUS brought to Liberia in 2015 to support our caring for the chimpanzees and whose contracts ended in 2017. These consultants were seeking to immediately take in additional chimpanzees (from the pet trade, for example) at an unsustainable rate, while we already had the responsibility of caring for more than 60 chimpanzees. It is a difficult choice for any sanctuary to say no to additional residents, but it is sometimes necessary for the long-term welfare of the animals and sustainability of the project. Each chimpanzee requires a 50- to 60-year commitment, and we had serious concerns about the long-term impacts of taking on new residents without the appropriate living space or funds for their care. In addition, as was explained to the Desmonds at the time, the \$6 million from the New York Blood Center can only be used towards the care of the former research chimpanzees and their offspring, and is not allowed to be used for other chimpanzees. As a result of our differing opinions, we parted ways and the consultants chose to start their own sanctuary to care for orphan chimpanzees brought to them. As a gesture of good will, we offered them a grant, even allowing them to keep four vehicles that had been devoted to our operations. We wish them success with their sanctuary while we remain dedicated to the former research chimpanzees in our care.

In addition to our sanctuary work in Liberia, we also have a humane education program in fifteen schools and 20 communities in the surrounding area, as well as programs to address the plight of wildlife and companion animals. These activities are financed by us from our own funds and not from the \$6 million from the New York Blood Center. We are playing an important role in addressing the root causes of problems that impact animals, including wild chimpanzees, in Liberia.

We do hope you will refrain from further publishing incorrect information about the HSUS's dedication to, and care of, chimpanzees. You clearly care about these



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animals, but your actions are not only harming the chimpanzees at Project Chimps and Second Chance Chimpanzee Refuge Liberia, but the hundreds of chimpanzees in laboratories waiting for their chance at sanctuary retirement.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Conlee
Vice President, Animal Research Issues

Director, Second Chance Chimpanzee Refuge Liberia
Humane Society International