Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 8, 2016

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We are writing to respectfully request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a review of systems for accountability and transparency about intramural animal research at federal agencies.

Recent cases of abuse, waste and accountability gaps documented by independent organizations have highlighted the need for additional scrutiny of intramural animal research programs at federal facilities. These instances include animal mistreatment and oversight failures at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat Animal Research Center,[1] the National Institutes of Health (NIH) long-standing chimpanzee research program being deemed "unnecessary,"[2] and recent reports documenting a lack of transparency about experiments on dogs by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Defense, Food and Drug Administration, NIH, and Department of Veterans Affairs.[3]

Unfortunately, we have discovered it is impossible to determine what federal animal research programs currently entail, what they cost and if they meet federal standards because of the limited and decentralized information available publicly. Federal agencies are not currently required to publicly report their total use of animals in research, do not publish noncompliance reports and generally do not maintain searchable databases of animal research projects with information about their purpose, methods, results, and cost.

In addition to concerns about public disclosure, recent Congressional Research Service inquiries by Members of Congress reveal that some agencies do not internally track their laboratory animal use, what animal research projects they are conducting, or what these projects cost.

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[1] Moss, Michael. "Lawmakers Aim to Protect Farm Animals in U.S. Research." The New York Times. The New York Times, 5 Feb. 2015. Web. 15 Nov. 2016. Accessed at:
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/dining/lawmakers-aim-to-protect-farm-animals-in-us-research.html

[2] Fears, Darryl. "NIH Ends Era of U.S. Medical Research on Chimpanzees." Washington Post. The Washington Post, 18 Nov. 2015. Web. 15 Nov. 2016. Accessed at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2015/11/18/nih-ends-the-era-of-us-medical-research-on-chimpanzees/

[3] Brulliard, Karin. "Should Dogs Be Guinea Pigs in Government Research? A Bipartisan Group Says No." The Washington Post. WP Company, 15 Nov. 2016. Web. 17 Nov. 2016. Accessed at:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2016/11/15/saving-dogs-from-government-research-labs-gets-some-bipartisan-attention/

Such transparency and accounting deficiencies prevent assessments by Congress and the public of the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of what we estimate to be a multi-billion-dollar government enterprise.

Congressional concern about animal research oversight and accountability is not new. The GAO has a long history of offering Congress prudent analyses and recommendations that have improved the management, oversight and efficiency of federally-funded animal research programs. Previous GAO studies of animal research conducted and funded by various agencies have identified issues including "inadequate public disclosure,"[4,5] insufficient oversight and failure to track program costs,[6] and mismanagement of programs designed to improve animal welfare and save taxpayers money.[7] Our research indicates that problems previously identified by GAO have persisted.

In view of concerns about the accountability and openness of federal animal research programs, we request that GAO:

- Identify which federal agencies currently conduct animal research and testing

- Identify and assess systems used by each agency for informing Congress and the public about the purpose, status, outcomes and cost of all recent and ongoing animal research and testing projects

- Identify and assess systems used by each agency for tracking and publicly reporting the total number of animals used and the nature of their use in research and testing

- Identify and assess systems used by each agency for tracking and publicly reporting animal research noncompliance in their laboratories

- Identify and assess systems used by each agency for tracking and publicly reporting spending on the development and use of alternatives to animal testing

- Determine how much each agency spent on animal research and testing in FY16

- Determine how many animals each agency used for research and testing in FY16

- Determine what improvements can be made to federal animal research reporting systems

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[4] U.S. GAO, DOD Animal Research: Improvements Needed in Quality of Biomedical Research Database, GAO-99-24 (Washington, DC, 1998), http://gao.gov/products/NSIAD/HEHS-99-24 (accessed November 15, 2016).
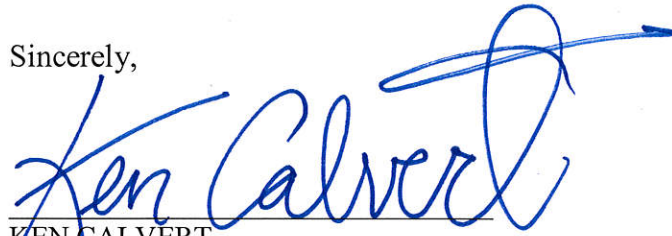
[5] U.S. GAO, DOD Animal Research: Controls on Animal Use Are Generally Effective, but Improvements Are Needed, GAO-99-156 (Washington, DC, 1999), http://gao.gov/products/NSIAD/HEHS-99-156 (accessed November 15, 2016).

[6] U.S. GAO, Animal Welfare: USDA's Oversight of Dealers of Random Source Dogs and Cats Would Benefit from Additional Management Information and Analysis, GAO-10-945 (Washington, DC, 2010), http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-10-945 (accessed November 15, 2016).

[7] U.S. GAO, NIH Chimpanzee Management Program: Consolidation Should Achieve Cost Savings, but a Clear Implementation Plan Is Needed, GAO-16-392 (Washington, DC, 2016), http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-392 (accessed November 15, 2016).

Once again, we appreciate GAO's assistance with this effort and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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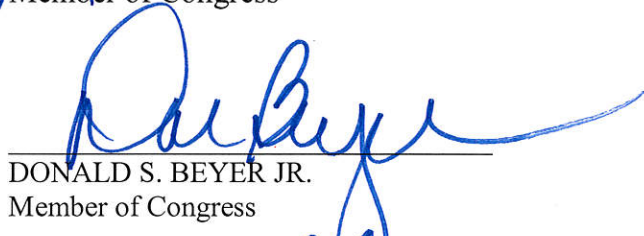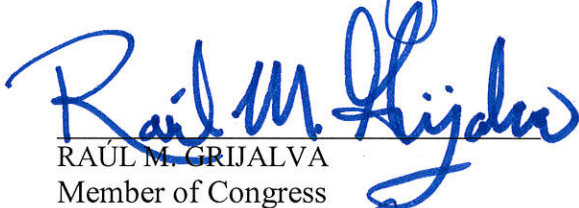KEN CALVERT
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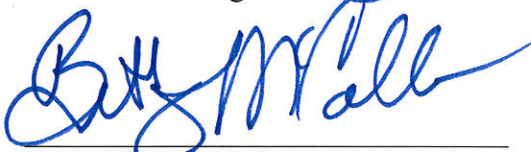DONALD S. BEYER JR.
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