U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Enforcement

Statement by:
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Chris Abee. I am an Emeritus Professor retired from the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. For over 40 years, I studied the biology of nonhuman primates and conducted research to find better ways to treat or prevent both human and animal diseases.

My testimony today aims to highlight the importance of Long-Tailed Macaques and other nonhuman primates in biomedical research. Of the approximately 70,000 nonhuman primates used in research annually, almost half are Long-Tailed Macaques (Macaca fascicularis) imported from Asia. These animals are crucial for pharmaceutical studies and for publicly funded research to advance our understanding of disease prevention and treatment.

We use the term "nonhuman primate" because humans are also primates. The phylogenetic proximity between human and nonhuman primates makes them invaluable in biomedical research. Their genomes are approximately 95% identical to the human genome, resulting in many body systems, such as the immune and cardiovascular systems closely resembling those of humans.

A report published last year by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) titled "Nonhuman Primate Models in Biomedical Research: State of the Science and Future Needs" (National Academies Press, 500 Fifth Street, NW, Keck 360, Washington, DC 20001; (800) 624-6242 or (202) 334-3313; http://www.nap.edu), concluded that research requiring nonhuman primates remains essential to our country's biomedical discovery and translational research pipeline.

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic placed enormous pressure on our country's domestic primate research resources. During this time, China, our primary source of imported primates, halted exports to the U.S. This action sharply increased the cost of these animals from $5,000 to as much as $50,000 each, effectively pricing out scientists with NIH grants.

Simultaneously, animal rights organizations have attempted to use the Endangered Species Act and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reclassify these animals as endangered species. Such a classification would make them unavailable for research. Therefore, the decision to reclassify a species as endangered must be based on solid scientific data and taken very seriously.

The U.S. leads the world in biomedical research, but our country's leadership is fragile. China has openly expressed its intention to replace the U.S. as the world leader in biomedical research. They have built primate research centers with capacity surpassing the U.S. and have no restrictions on primate use in research.

In conclusion, I hope I have conveyed the importance of nonhuman primates to our country's biomedical research programs. I urge Congress to consider directing the NIH and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop action plans ensuring both supply and availability of primates for publicly and privately funded medical research. These plans should be developed by outside committees of experts rather than NIH and USFWS staff. In my opinion, this will only happen with a Congressional mandate.