

Submitter: Debra Merskin

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General
Government, and Veterans

Measure: HB2904

The expression "those who have nothing to hide, hide nothing," was never truer than the situation at Oregon National Primate Research Center. I am writing to you as someone committed to social justice, for animals and for humans and ask you to support HP2904 to require that an "institution or research facility that performs research, testing, or studies involving nonhuman primates" be required "to annual report certain information to State Veterinarian." Not only has the lack of transparency meant animal suffering but human as well. There has been maiming and killing of animals who by law deserve some protections. Twice Rep. Gomberg toured the facility and spoke from the House floor of the Oregon legislature in order to highlight not only the high incidence of documented animal welfare violations but also the unbelievably cruel, repetitive experiments conducted on the animals. He learned that two animals were killed when technicians failed to remove them from their cages before the cages went through an industrial washing machine. Rep Gomberge sent OHSU a public records request to learn more about the incident. After months of stonewalling and delays, and after demanding that he, an elected state representative, pay \$1000 for their effort in finding and sending the requested information, OHSU finally began sending documents. What they revealed is a facility awash in low morale and an internal culture that creates the kind of environment that is sure to lead to more suffering and deaths. Protesting employees noted: "This fatal act of gross negligence spotlights the systemic dysfunction – fueled by a toxic culture of intimidation and harassment – that has been present for years within the cage crew. We are disappointed that this dangerous culture has continued unchanged post-tragedy."

While most of the documents from OHSU are heavily redacted, what is clear is that there is a toxic culture with disregard for the humane treatment of animals and employees. A 60-signature petition came from employees including administration, behavior science staff, veterinary and husbandry staff, and staff. Others wanted to speak out but fear retaliation.

The ONPRC has committed at least a dozen violations of the Animal Welfare Act over the past few years due to its inexcusable mistreatment of primates. Many of those violations were considered "critical violations" by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In addition, many of the studies are repetitive and offer little in the way of benefiting human health. While we have deep concerns about the research being done in the name of science at ONPRC, this proposed legislation will not in any way impede that research. It simply requires that ONPRC provide basic

information about its use of nonhuman primates to the state veterinarian, who will be required to promptly post that information on his or her website for the benefit of the people of Oregon.

ONPRC has clearly shown it will not willingly provide basic information about its practices with nonhuman primates. In fact, ONPRC has shown that it will intentionally evade, deceive, and mislead Oregonians about those practices. Clearly, only a mandate by the legislature will bring about transparency and accountability.

We urge this Committee to pass HB 2904 with a “do pass” recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the people of our great state.

Respectfully,

Debra Merskin, PhD