

**PREPARED TESTIMONY OF
CONGRESSMAN EARL BLUMENAUER**

**DELIVERED TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
WATER, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE SUBCOMMITTEE**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JUNE 25, 2020**

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today.

The Captive Primate Safety Act would amend the Lacey Act Amendments of 1981 to prohibit the interstate commerce of nonhuman primates so that these animals can be longer kept as pets. The practice of keeping nonhuman primates as pets poses serious risks to their welfare, as well as public health and safety. Most people cannot provide the special care, housing, and social structure these animals require, putting their very welfare at risk.

This behavior also puts humans at risk, either from the transmission of zoonotic diseases or due to serious harm. When primates reach adolescence, they will often demonstrate aggression towards those they perceive as having a “lower ranking” members of their troop. When kept as pets, this means that they can inflict physical harm on humans such as children, friends, and neighbors.

For example, in 2009, Charla Nash was brutally attacked by a chimpanzee in Stamford, Connecticut. The chimpanzee, Travis, was kept as a pet by her neighbor. Despite previous public incidents where this nonhuman primate displayed aggressive behavior, he was kept as a pet despite it being illegal in the state of Connecticut. Then one day Charla had her face and hands ripped off by the chimpanzee and was left horribly disfigured.

I’ve brought a picture of Ms. Nash after her injuries to share with you all what, exactly, this means. This isn’t just a minor bite, or a nip, this is a horrific injury that has left Charla forever scarred. I’m happy to share that Charla was one of the first people to receive a full-face transplant in 2011. Doctors also performed a hand transplant, which was later rejected. Charla even lost her sight due to a disease that was transmitted from this chimpanzee.

To some of you here today, this story and this bill may be quite familiar. That’s because it passed the House of Representatives with overwhelming support under suspension of the rules in the 110th and the 111th Congresses. In fact, in 2009 we voted on this legislation just a week after Charla Nash was attacked.

Charla has gone on to heroically share her story with the American public and to advocate on behalf of this legislation. Yet Congress has yet to act, and Charla is not alone.

Since 1990, approximately 300 people have reported being injured by primates kept by private individuals. Many more incidents likely go unreported. Some of our colleagues may want to argue that this legislation is entirely unnecessary, and that many states have laws on the books to restrict this practice. Yet these state laws vary wildly from a complete ban on pet primates, to a ban on specific species, to some with no restrictions at all.

Beyond this patchwork of laws, without Federal protections to stop this practice, many states will provide lax or even no enforcement at all. The Captive Primate Safety Act would actually help strengthen existing state laws and create a federal framework of protection, licensing, and outlawing this practice.

It's time for Congress to finally act and extend the protections dealing with captive primates, to do right by Charla Nash and to help protect our communities.