

Open Letter to the Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board
Re: Greg Smith, Pet Stop Owner and Board President

As concerned citizens and advocates for ethical animal care, we write to express our deep concern regarding Greg Smith's continued role as a member—and President—of the Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board, while simultaneously keeping a highly social primate in conditions that contradict best practices and humane standards. This conflict of interest not only undermines the credibility of the Board, but also contributes to the prolonged suffering of an animal in his care.

Frankie is an 18-year-old capuchin monkey who has spent nearly his entire life confined in a wire enclosure inside Pet Stop, a retail store owned and operated by Greg Smith in Shawnee, Kansas. Frankie was purchased at just six months old from a private zoo and has lived in solitary confinement ever since. According to publicly available information and direct statements from Mr. Smith, Frankie has no access to the outdoors, no opportunity for social interaction with other primates, and minimal environmental enrichment. These conditions fly in the face of decades of primatological research and expert consensus, which emphasize that primates—especially highly intelligent species like capuchins—require complex social, emotional, and sensory environments in order to thrive.

Moreover, **Frankie's long-term isolation may violate the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA)**, which requires that nonhuman primates be housed with conspecifics unless a veterinarian certifies, in writing every 30 days, that solitary housing is necessary for the animal's health or well-being (9 C.F.R. § 3.81). There is no publicly available evidence that such documentation exists or that Frankie receives routine veterinary exemptions. If this requirement is not being met—and if the USDA has failed to enforce it—the responsibility falls to state-level advocates and advisory boards to intervene.

Greg Smith's dual role as the store owner responsible for Frankie's confinement and the President of the Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board presents a serious ethical dilemma. The Advisory Board exists to guide animal welfare policy in the state of Kansas. How can the public trust its decisions when the Board's own leadership fails to model the standards of humane care it is meant to uphold? Smith's personal interests are in direct tension with the principles of animal welfare the Board is charged with promoting. His continued involvement sends a troubling message: that commercial gain and personal convenience take precedence over animal wellbeing—even when expert-backed alternatives are available.

Over the past two years, advocates have exhausted all diplomatic avenues to improve Frankie's quality of life. Two accredited primate sanctuaries have offered to welcome Frankie into their care at no cost to Mr. Smith or the state. These facilities have decades of experience rehabilitating primates from similar conditions and would provide Frankie with access to socialization, open space, and species-appropriate care. Mr. Smith has refused. In response,

concerned community members have filed complaints with the USDA, issued public appeals, organized petitions that have garnered over 65,000 signatures, and sought dialogue with relevant officials—all to no avail. Frankie's plight has also drawn significant public attention, with his story covered in multiple outlets including the Johnson County Post and the Kansas City Star.

We therefore call on the Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board to take immediate action. At a minimum, we urge the Board to:

- Issue a public statement condemning the long-term solitary confinement of Frankie;
- Launch a formal review of Greg Smith's conduct as both an animal business owner and Board President;
- Evaluate the potential for policy or permit updates to ensure animals like Frankie are not held in inhumane conditions under the guise of display or companionship; and
- Consider removing Greg Smith from the Board for actions that violate both the spirit and ethical responsibilities of this body.

The Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board's integrity depends on its members upholding the highest standards of animal welfare. If the Board fails to act, it not only fails Frankie—it also risks eroding public trust in the institutions tasked with protecting animals in Kansas. To support the Board in fulfilling its duty, the following pages of this letter include endorsements from leading primate experts, along with scientific documentation attesting to the harm Frankie endures in solitary confinement and the benefits of sanctuary care. We stand ready to provide any additional information the Board may require to ensure Frankie's welfare and to uphold the standards expected of this body.

Sincerely,

Kansas City Action for Animals, supported by:

North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA)

In Defense of Animals, International Animal Protection Organization

Justin Marceau, JD, Professor of Law at the University of Denver, Sturm College of Law

Dr. Marilyn Norconk, Primatologist and field researcher of South American primates, Professor Emeritus, Kent State University, Keep 'Em Wild Campaign organizer, Conservation Committee, American Society of Primatologists

Dr. Mary Lee Jensvold, Primate Cognition and Welfare Researcher, Central Washington University & Fauna Foundation

Dr. Susan Alberts, The Robert F. Durden Distinguished Professor, Departments of Biology and Evolutionary Anthropology, Duke University

Dr. Anneke DeLuycker, Professor of Conservation Biology, George Mason University

Dr. Lori Sheeran, Primate Behavior & Welfare Researchers, Central Washington University

Dr. Jessica Mayhew, Primate Social Behavior, Socio-Cognition, and Captive Welfare
Researcher, Central Washington University

Dr. Jessica Pierce, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Faculty Affiliate with the
Center for Bioethics and Humanities

Dr. Marc Bekoff, University of Colorado, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Author
of *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and
Empathy—and Why They Matter*

Expert Statements

In Defense of Animals, “Capuchin monkeys are highly intelligent, social animals who thrive in groups and natural environments. Frankie has never had the opportunity to socialize with other monkeys or climb trees. Instead he is alone and confined in an artificial indoor environment. Nearly two decades of isolation and deprivation have caused psychological trauma. Frankie deserves sanctuary where he can experience the outdoors, space to explore, the company of his own kind, and engage in natural behaviors.”

Dr. Susan Alberts, “Social isolation of the sort that Frankie is experiencing is well-documented to be extremely damaging to health and survival for primates, who are highly social organisms that depend upon conspecifics to thrive. The negative effects of social isolation on health and survival have been documented both in captivity (where isolation can be acute) and in the wild (where isolation can still occur although more mildly). It’s also well documented that physical confinement of the sort that Frankie is experiencing has negative consequences for long-term health in highly mobile, active animals like capuchin monkeys. Keeping primates in social isolation captivity is a behavior that humans have engaged in for centuries; nonetheless, this habitual human behavior causes physiological damage to the primates that are kept.”

Dr. Anneke DeLuycker, “I am writing to express my concern for the welfare of this tufted capuchin monkey, Frankie, living in solitary confinement inside a retail pet store in Shawnee, Kansas. As a primatologist, with a deep understanding of primate behavior and welfare, I urge the owners to relinquish Frankie to an accredited sanctuary. Long-term solitary confinement without access to outdoor areas is harmful to this monkey’s well-being. Being exposed to people in such close, exposed quarters is also harmful for Frankie; humans and non-human primates share similar DNA and so any exposure to bacteria or viruses (for example: the flu, coronavirus, or norovirus) can be harmful for Frankie. Diseases can then be transferred back to people. Capuchins are social beings and need social interaction and communication opportunities with other individuals of the same species. There are many studies that show that the frequency of abnormal behaviors shown by primates (that are under human care) decreases when individuals are housed socially (here is just one example: <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/tpss/vol10/iss2/9/>).

Transfer to a sanctuary would be humane and life-changing for this primate, as he would be provided access to large, outdoor areas and allowed to interact socially with other individuals of capuchin monkeys.”

Dr. Jessica Pierce, “As a bioethicist specializing in cognitive ethology and animal behavior, I find Frankie’s long incarceration at a pet shop deeply troubling. There is now strong scientific consensus that animals held in captivity suffer from a range of physical and psychological sequelae, including chronic activation of the stress response, decreased immunity, shortened lifespan, and protracted emotional suffering. The poor welfare of captive animals is exacerbated when their living conditions fail to provide adequate social and environmental enrichment. Capuchin monkeys are highly intelligent, socially adept, and emotionally complex. They do not fare well in captivity under the best of circumstances, but Frankie’s confinement in an isolated cage in a pet store, on display for human entertainment, is nothing short of cruel. I encourage the Pet Animal Advisory Board to consider allowing Frankie to live out the rest of his life in an appropriate sanctuary environment.”

Dr. Marc Bekoff, “Frankie, like all sentient and emotional beings, needs far better treatment than he currently is receiving. Being confined—literally trapped---alone with no companions in a tiny cage with no access to the outdoors is thoroughly inhumane and ethically indefensible. I hope that the people who are responsible for such cruelty will let Frankie go to a GFAS-accredited sanctuary who can offer him the life he fully deserves. Nothing would be lost by moving him and much would be gained in terms of his quality of life--his physical and emotional well-being. So, please do this right now, not later, because it's the right thing to do.”

Justin Marceau, JD, “Sanctuary placement for a social primate such as Frankie is both standard practice in the field and essential to his long-term well-being. Prolonged solitary confinement causes profound and often irreversible harm, making immediate relocation the most humane and scientifically supported course of action. As a law professor, I find it deeply troubling that a state regulatory framework would allow such treatment to persist.”



Advocacy Position Statement Private Ownership of Primates

The North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA) is opposed to the private ownership of primates.

Unlike dogs and cats, apes and monkeys are not domesticated animals. Non-human primates are extremely social animals whose normal development requires the company of others of their own kind. Ideally, primates should live in the wild. Their natural habitats include species-typical social groups that allow them to learn from their families and have a rich emotional life. In reality, however, there is an active industry that breeds primates to sell as pets in human homes.

As infants, primates in the pet trade are removed from their mothers years before they would naturally separate, which causes psychological suffering that manifests throughout their entire life. Teeth are often removed for ease of handling, which can limit the foods they can eat. Qualified veterinary care for pet primates can be difficult, if not impossible, to find.

Primates are inquisitive animals whose proper care requires daily mental stimulation and extensive physical activity, which is often impossible for the average household to provide. Primates kept in human homes are rarely, if ever, monitored by animal welfare officials, which means they are often kept in unsuitable living conditions resulting in neglect, mistreatment, and myriad psychological and physical ailments that can lead to death. There are a range of zoonotic diseases that are transmitted by primates and can be harmful, even fatal, to humans.

Once primates reach adolescence, which can be just a few years into a 40+ year lifespan, they inevitably become too unmanageable to handle. Primates can and will bite. They have strong jaws and sharp teeth, and bites can result in significant and potentially fatal injuries to humans. Realizing that living with an adult primate is not sustainable, owners often seek to surrender their pets or are forced to surrender them due to a threat to public safety.

Many primates that were privately owned end up living in roadside zoos, recycled as breeders to produce the next generation of ill-fated pets, or in other abusive situations. In the best cases, former pets may end up in a NAPSA member sanctuary, where they live their remaining years in an enriched environment more typical to their species. Even in sanctuary, former pets often struggle with learning how to socialize with other primates and many exhibit abnormal behaviors for the rest of their lives.

The private ownership of primates is never in the best interest of the animal or the owner.

For more information:

["Legislative Recommendations to Prohibit the Possession, Sale, Breeding, Import, or Transfer of Dangerous Wild Animals,"](#) American Bar Association

["White Paper: Personal Possession of Non-Human Primates,"](#) Association of Zoos and Aquariums

["The Phenomenon of Monkeys as 'Surrogate Children',"](#) Linda J. Howard

["Private Ownership of Nonhuman Primates,"](#) International Primatological Society

["Atypical Experiences of Captive Chimpanzees \(Pan Troglodytes\) Are Associated with Higher Hair Cortisol Concentrations as Adults,"](#) S.L. Jacobson, H.D. Freeman, R.M. Santymire, S.R. Ross

["My Child is a Monkey,"](#) and ["The Perils of Keeping Monkeys as Pets,"](#) National Geographic

["The Science Behind Why Chimps Are Not Pets,"](#) PBS

["Significant Zoonotic Disease of Non-Human Primates,"](#) Walter Reed Army Institute



Nonhuman primates, humankind's closest living relatives, are wild animals that have never been domesticated. Most species live in complex social groups with long periods of infant dependency on adults, and many species have specific dietary requirements. High levels of intelligence and long memories reflect the complexity of the social and ecological setting they evolved in. Adults can have sharp canine teeth and strong jaws, and this feature combined with grasping hands make primates formidable in the face of perceived threats. Their close relationship to humans means that some infectious diseases are shared and can be transmitted between people and nonhuman primates. Nearly half of all nonhuman primate species are threatened with extinction in nature, so it is important to support intact populations in the wild.

The Captive Primate Safety Act is a bill currently being considered in US Congress that, if passed, would ban private ownership of nonhuman primates. In addition to concerns about depletion of wild populations to fuel the pet trade, primatologists and zoologists note that it is impossible to humanely care for these animals as pets. Sanctuary and zoo professional organizations, the American Society of Primatologists, and the International Primatological Society urge people keeping pet nonhuman primates to retire them to accredited sanctuary or zoo settings, where skilled caregivers familiar with their needs can help integrate them into the social groups they need to thrive, provide them with stimulating and enriched environments, and meet their spatial and dietary needs. For example, domesticated fruit has a higher sugar content than the wild fruit varieties primates evolved to eat, and a diet relying on domesticated fruit can lead to obesity and diabetes.

The anxiety and stress that a wild animal experiences when living as a pet can result in poor health, lethargy, self-mutilation, and aggression directed toward people in the form of bites, grabs, and scratches, and these interactions can lead to disease transfer. Nonhuman primates' dexterous hands and powerful minds mean that they seek opportunities to free themselves from enclosures, and once they are loose, they can cause harm to the public and damage to property. Pet primates are often kept alone, in solitary confinement, and this aspect of their lives is particularly detrimental given that they evolved to live in large, complex social groups.

Capuchins (> 20 recognized species) are C and S American monkeys that are often part of the US nonhuman primate pet trade. These monkeys have famously long periods of development, a large brain size to body size ratio, and can live 40+ years. Several capuchin species are considered omnivorous, meaning they eat varying amounts of wild fruits, insects, leaves, nectar, nuts, and pith. Tufted capuchins spend one-third of their time moving across their 8-9 km² home range. Group sizes vary by species but tend to range from ~15-50+ individuals. Across the capuchin species, some are listed as critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable to extinction.

The challenges of caring for nonhuman primates combined with their unique social and ecological requirements and their rarity in nature make it imperative that those holding these animals as pets retire them to accredited facilities where their needs can be met. As wild animals, nonhuman primates pose risks to the humans around in the form of injuries and disease transmission, and they often seek to

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escape, which can have disastrous outcomes. The American Society of Primatologists provides tips on how to retire a pet nonhuman primate to an accredited facility ([Tips and information to assist with the retirement of monkeys from research settings to private sanctuaries - American Society of Primatologists](#)).

Lori K. Sheeran

Lori K. Sheeran, Ph.D.

Jessica A. Mayhew

Jessica A. Mayhew, Ph.D.

Sources

American Society of Primatologists Keep 'Em Wild Campaign - [American Society of Primatologists](#)

American Zoological Association White Paper on Personal Possession of Nonhuman Primates
[personal possession of non-human primates 7212015.pdf](#)

de la Torre, S., Moscoso, P., Mendez-Carvajal, P.G., Rosales-Meda, M., Palacios, E., Link, A., Lynch Alfaro, J.W. & Mittermeier, R.A. 2021. *Cebus capucinus* (amended version of 2020 assessment). *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2021: e.T81257277A191708164.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-1.RLTS.T81257277A191708164.en>

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http://pin.primate.wisc.edu/factsheets/entry/tufted_capuchin/cons

International Primatological Society Position Statement on Private Ownership of Nonhuman Primates
[IPS | Private Ownership of Nonhuman Primates](#)

NAPSA Statement on Private Ownership of Primates [Position Statements - Primate Sanctuaries](#)

NPR, July 2025, [Captive Primate Safety Act aims to curb illegal pet trade in the U.S. : NPR](#)

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August 29, 2025

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in regard to Frankie, an 18 year old capuchin monkey living in a cage inside of a pet shop in Shawnee, KS. I am a primatologist with a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology. I have studied the behavior of primates for over 3 decades. I am a senior lecturer in Primate Behavior & Ecology at Central Washington University and have taught classes in primate behavior and advise graduate students. I have dozens of publications on primate communication, behavior, and husbandry practices. I also have spent decades caring for monkeys and apes in a variety of settings.

Monkeys are highly social, intelligent, active, and sentient. The Animal Welfare Act requires that we provide for their psychological well being. As a measure of this, we often turn to their natural behavior as an indicator of what constitutes psychological well being and what we should provide in the captive environment to allow them to manifest those behaviors. As group living social beings, they must be around other monkeys. From the information provided to me, I understand that Frankie has not been around other monkeys, and he lives alone in a cage. The amounts to deprivation which can cause abnormal behaviors, self harm, and does not allow for the expression of sociality. Thus this would compromise his psychological well being.

Capuchin monkeys are intelligent in the wild make and use tools to acquire food. This means in captivity we should provide an interesting diverse environment with opportunities to solve problems and use tool. Frankie is in a 10x10 ft cage which he never leaves. This is hardly interesting and diverse. He should have access to the outdoors, he should have opportunity to run, walk, and climb. The enclosure he is housed in would not allow for him to express those behaviors to their fullest. Again we see a deprivation situation.

I understand there are accredited sanctuaries willing to provide permanent placement for Frankie. This is the best option for Frankie. He will have greater space and opportunity for social interactions with other monkeys. As the director of a sanctuary myself, I have witnessed how healing can occur when primates are placed under the care of skilled individuals with an understanding of primate behavior and the means to provide that, including large appropriate enclosures, diverse environmental enrichment, and other monkeys.

Should you have questions, please feel free to contact me at jensvold@faunafoundation.org.

Sincerely,

Mary Lee Jensvold, Ph.D