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## **N E W S     R E L E A S E**

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### **Congress Finalizes Legislation Jeopardizing Future Animal Research**

Jenkintown, PA— The American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) and Alternatives Research & Development Foundation (ARDF) expressed deep concern for the protection of animals in laboratories if Congress passes the Farm Bill conference report as expected. The House voted on Thursday to approve the report by 280-141. A vote by the Senate is expected this week. An amendment to formally alter the definition of "animal" by excluding birds, mice, and rats from protection under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), the fundamental U.S. law protecting warm-blooded animals used in research and other industries, was slipped into the Farm Bill by retiring Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC). Although the amendment was never discussed in either the House or the Senate, the conference committee adopted the amendment, despite on-going investigations into several recent incidents of abuse, neglect, and grossly inhumane deaths of mice and rats used in laboratory experiments at some of the premier U.S. research institutions, such as Johns Hopkins University and the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill.

"We are extremely disappointed to find that Senator Helms and biomedical research lobbyists were able to use a concerted campaign of misinformation to push an amendment that will result in such severe set-backs for the welfare of animals in laboratories, and for the quality of the research conducted in those laboratories," said ARDF Executive Director John McArdle. "The U.S. now stands out as the only nation in the world to deliberately prohibit legal protection for the vast majority of animals used in research, testing, and education."

For the last five years, AAVS and its scientific affiliate, ARDF, have been working diligently in an effort to obtain the legal protection for birds, mice, and rats provided by the AWA but illegally denied under USDA's implementing regulations. After years of legal wrangling and courtroom proceedings, standing was awarded by a federal court judge and, in October 2000, a settlement was reached in a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) calling for the inclusion of birds, mice, and rats—over 23 million animals used in U.S. laboratories—under the department's AWA regulations. The USDA agreed to begin the process of drafting guidelines for regulatory oversight of these species and was expected to solicit public comment from all stakeholders.

Helms offered the amendment in response to exaggerated and misleading claims by biomedical research proponents, chiefly the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR), an organization that seeks to ensure that 95 percent of animals used in research, testing, and education receive no minimal, legal protections while used in any U.S. laboratory.

The Working Group to Preserve the Animal Welfare Act convened last year by AAVS and ARDF brought together a number of key national animal protection organizations to work towards protection for birds, mice, and rats. Support for the inclusion of these animals under the AWA extends far beyond that of animal advocates. Scientists, veterinarians, and scientific organizations also advocated for AWA protection for these animals, including the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science, the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine, Colgate-Palmolive, the Johns Hopkins Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing, Procter & Gamble, and the Scientists Center for Animal Welfare.

"In what we now call Campaign 50, animal advocacy organizations will work for the passage of legislation in all 50 states to provide the protection Helms has denied to these tens of millions of animals," said Tina Nelson, AAVS Executive Director. "It certainly is preferable to have one federal law instead of having 50 individual laws with potentially 50 different sets of standards, but legal protection is vital." AAVS and ARDF, among several other animal advocacy organizations, are urging the Senate to vote against the conference report.

The American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) is a non-profit animal advocacy and educational organization dedicated to ending experiments on animals in research, testing, and education. Founded in 1883, AAVS is the oldest organization in the United States dedicated to eliminating experiments on animals. AAVS pursues its objectives through legal and effective advocacy, education, and development of alternative methods. The Alternatives Research & Development Foundation was founded in 1994 to support the development and use of alternatives to laboratory animals through education and funding of related research projects.

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