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PRESS RELEASE

Edwardsville— Madison County State's Attorney Tom Gibbons has filed misdemeanor charges today against the former owner of a monkey that was the center of a custody dispute last month.

Nina, the female Java Macaque monkey, was at a public event in Godfrey on June 2, 2013 with her owner Kendra D. Houglund when she bit a 6-year-old boy. Following the incident, Madison County Animal Control took possession of the monkey who allowed a local woman to keep the monkey at her residence as local facilities were not set up to house a primate during a required quarantine period.

The temporary guardian subsequently transported Nina to Indiana without the knowledge of local officials forcing State's Attorney Gibbons to file a Declaration of the Right of Possession with the court in order to regain possession of the primate and turn it over to the St. Louis Zoo. On June 28, Circuit Judge Barb Crowder granted the State's request and officials with the St. Louis Zoo took possession of Nina on July 3rd and transported her to a rescue center in Kentucky where she will remain.

During the course of the investigation, it was determined that Houglund, an Alton resident, who had been in possession of Nina since August 30, 2012, did not lawfully own her and was in violation of the "Dangerous Animal Act" which makes it a criminal offense to possess a primate. She was charged today with three counts of Unlawful Possession of a Primate, a Class C Misdemeanor, and was given a notice to appear. Penalties range from fines and probation up to 30 days in jail. Gibbons plans to seek restitution for medical costs for the victim's family as well as the costs incurred in caring for Nina.

Gibbons expressed his concern for the young victim in the case. He also offered thanks to everyone involved in bringing the investigation and placement of Nina to a satisfactory conclusion. "This was a difficult situation," he stated. "I want to thank the St. Louis Zoo for their work not only as an organization that is dedicated to the well-being of wild animals, but also for being such a great community partner." He also noted that this case is a good example as to why the State of Illinois includes primates in the Dangerous Animals Act. "Nina is now in a place that is much better equipped to take care of her and her needs as a wild animal. I hope this case serves as a lesson to anyone who considers having a wild animal as a pet in their home."

This charge, as well as the statements made herein, is based upon probable cause. The defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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