



CITY OF ORANGE

Office of Mayor

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August 23, 2023

The Honorable Maria Hernandez
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: City of Orange Response to Grand Jury Report: Gimme Shelter, and a Pound of Advice, "The State of Animal Welfare Overseen by the County of Orange"

Dear Honorable Judge Hernandez:

The following is the City of Orange's response to the findings and recommendations contained in the Grand Jury's Report, *Gimme Shelter, and a Pound of Advice, "The State of Animal Welfare Overseen by the County of Orange."* The City of Orange was asked to respond to Findings F4, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, F12, F13, F15, and F16 and Recommendation R6.

FINDINGS:

F4. Based on industry standards and best practices, Orange County Animal Care kennel attendants are understaffed to meet the needs of animals under care.

City's Response: Disagrees partially with the finding. Orange County Animal Care ("OCAC") has acknowledged there are position vacancies. OCAC is taking all considered efforts to fill those positions. Fluctuations in animal populations housed by OCAC coupled with different species triggers varying personnel needs. The findings are based on industry standards. Although helpful, they may not encompass all factors that should be considered to identify necessary staffing levels. Finally, it should be noted that OCAC, Orange County Human Resources Services ("OCHRS"), and Orange County Community Resources ("OCCR") have made assurances that resources have been added to make the recruitment process more efficient.

F6. The Orange County Animal Care Volunteer program was stopped during COVID-19 and restarting the program has been slow, resulting in decreased animal socialization and enrichment.

City's Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding. The State of California formerly ended the COVID-19 State of Emergency on February 23, 2023. To better meet safety guidelines, OCAC suspended volunteer recruitments and selectively used volunteers in accordance with applicable safety guidelines. Since the COVID-19 State of Emergency

termination, OCAC stated they have reactivated the program and have held monthly volunteer trainings to recruit new individuals.

F7. Orange County Animal Care's Behavior Evaluation Committee evaluates dogs for euthanasia without written guidelines, policies, or procedures, resulting in inconsistent outcomes over time. Behavior evaluated euthanasia outcomes are dependent on the experience and personal considerations of the individual committee members and management rather than written objective standards.

City's Response: Disagrees partially with the finding. OCAC has assured its Behavior Evaluation Committee assess dogs while relying on applicable euthanasia guidelines to promote greater consistency. Evaluation outcomes are tethered to the characteristics of each animal, and since OCAC cannot dictate its intake population, outcome results will differ commensurate with the varying animal characteristics.

F8. The rate of behavior euthanasia of dogs has increased significantly over the last two years.

City's Response: Disagrees partially with the finding. OCAC cannot directly control the types of animals requiring intake, and as noted by OCAC, euthanasia is determined by the animal type and condition as it arrives at the shelter. While there has been an increase, OCAC has attributed this to the larger amount of abandoned, unsocialized dogs that display aggressive behavior. Lastly, as reported by OCAC, the dog save rate has remained stable over the past two years and is above the 90% called out in the Strategic Plan.

F9. Orange County Animal Care does not employ a professional or trained and certified behaviorist to oversee the shelter's dog enrichment program, resulting in dogs with declining behavior being placed at greater risk of being euthanized.

City's Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding. OCAC's has stated its program has been designed to ensure that animals have numerous interactions with multiple staff members while progressing through the shelter. Likewise, OCAC has affirmed that its personnel are hired based on training and experience; moreover, OCAC provides ongoing training to foster employee development while ensuring consistent animal evaluations. By employing this approach, OCAC has stated it has been able to accommodate changing dog demographics coming into the shelter and has expanded programming to better ensure positive outcomes. Examples include the TLC program and rescues partners placement program.

F10. While many county and city animal shelters throughout the state have active Trap, Neuter, and Return programs, Orange County Animal Care stopped its Trap, Neuter, and Return program, reportedly on the basis of the County Counsel's legal opinion that the program violates a California statute related to willful animal abandonment.

City's Response: Respondent agrees with the finding. The City of Orange agrees with this finding insofar that the City of Orange is relying on the information detailed in the subject grand jury report. However, the City of Orange also acknowledges that the County of Orange will not respond to this finding pursuant to attorney-client privilege.

F11. The termination of the Trap, Neuter, and Return program is correlated with an increase in adult cat euthanasia rate at the shelter.

City's Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding. While the Trap, Neuter, and Return program ("TNR") reduces adult cat reproduction, TNR has not necessarily been shown to have a direct correlation to adult cat euthanasia. OCAC has reiterated that euthanasia is guided by animal condition and type. OCAC has also noted it cannot dictate the types of animals requiring intake, and moreover, has stated it has prioritized sick, injured, and aggressive animals.

F12. There have been public concerns and requests expressed over the years for public programs to include a spay/neuter program by Orange County Animal Care.

City's Response: Disagrees with the finding. OCAC partners with the Healthcare & Emergency Animal Rescue Team to provide low cost spay/neuter clinics once a month. Additionally, while the City acknowledges the statements made in the grand jury report on this matter, the City of Orange has not received comments from the public for Orange County Animal Care to provide a spay/neuter program.

F13. The current adoption appointment system restricts public access to the dog kennels, thereby limiting potential adopters' access to all available animals.

City's Response: Disagree wholly with the finding. Per OCAC, in 2022, OCAC provided 10,457 adoption visits. This averages to 30 visits per day; moreover, OCAC stated it currently has roughly 58 appointments available per day which suggests that OCAC is more than able to meet the Community's needs.

F15: Internal and community engagement does not adequately communicate the shelter's mission and operating strategy.

City's Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding. OCAC hired a full-time Public Information Officer in October 2022. This position will concentrate on external communication. Additionally, OCAC has committed to attend at least 200 public outreach or adoption events in 2023, demonstrating a clear focus to continue, and build upon, OCAC program messaging.

F16. The information currently on the Orange County Animal Care website for low-cost spay/neuter is not up to date with regard to referrals and prices for spay/neuter procedures.

City's Response: Agrees with the finding. OCAC has expressed the information provided on its website is updated annually for the community's benefit. Privately owned clinics may update service hours/information which may not be reflected on the OCAC's website. Lastly, OCAC communicated that prices have never been posted on the OCAC website.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R6. By June 30, 2024, the Board of Supervisors should evaluate the strategic option of creating a Joint Powers Authority for the County and fourteen contract Cities to take ownership and shared responsibility for the financial and operating policies and practices of OCAC.

City's Response: Requires further analysis. The City of Orange's current agreement with OCAC for animal care services expires in 2026. The City of Orange will continue to work with OCAC on identifying potential alternative service models.

Thank you for your service and efforts on behalf of the City of Orange. We hope this response will be helpful.

Sincerely,



Daniel R. Slater
Mayor, City of Orange

cc: The Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

BCC: Michael Vigliotta, City Attorney