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From: Michael Mavrovouniotis [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 16, 2023 12:34 PM
To: Council
Subject: OC Animal Care - Grand Jury report

This is general public comment for the next city council meeting.

The Grand Jury Report issued a HIGHLY CRITICAL report on OC Animal Care. You can find it on the Grand Jury website, here:

https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.ocgrandjury.org_pdfs_2022-5F2023-5FGJreport_Gimme-5FShelter-5Fand-5Fa-5FPound-5Fof-5FAdvice.pdf&d=DwlFaQ&c=euGZstcaTDllvimEN8b7jXrwqOf-v5A_Cdp gnVfiiMM&r=fFxRBI2A431BhVaLc1jjqDLTD311djXfj0jgdkalyF4&m=aZZ0_9cjBqWgB_f9j-CZLSy_HyFdbBOKtDUmpAaL-zA&s=xajXm4UzIONWXSJHRJLL3oWksVzB4iJwcOD0SYjdlIAM&e=

* Write to your County Supervisor, your Mayor, and your City Council. Ask them to read the Grand Jury report, put an end to this scandal, and get OC Animal Care back on the right track.

* If you'd like any reports emailed to you, please contact gmoses4819@gmail.com

* Other reports on OC Animal Care:

https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__ocshelter.com&d=DwlFaQ&c=euGZstcaTDllvimEN8b7jXrwqOf-v5A_Cdp gnVfiiMM&r=fFxRBI2A431BhVaLc1jjqDLTD311djXfj0jgdkalyF4&m=aZZ0_9cjBqWgB_f9j-CZLSy_HyFdbBOKtDUmpAaL-zA&s=0yefNATx5LhE0T7Z3mRbCsTMXbalSYWelyusR8ZJk14&e=

* Another useful information site:

https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__opentheocshelter.com_&d=DwlFaQ&c=euGZstcaTDllvimEN8b7jXrwqOf-v5A_Cdp gnVfiiMM&r=fFxRBI2A431BhVaLc1jjqDLTD311djXfj0jgdkalyF4&m=aZZ0_9cjBqWgB_f9j-CZLSy_HyFdbBOKtDUmpAaL-zA&s=ujmb0LlwuXCf0udkoMLuwfN6n1kGmFMrZLSjOMvk9yY&e=

This is the SUMMARY taken word-for-word from the report:

Orange County Animal Care has been a source of public concern since the 1990s, with no less than five previous Orange County Grand Jury reports detailing troubling conditions. The previous reports cited excessive euthanasia rates, poor leadership, inadequate numbers of animal care attendants, a lack of cooperation between staff departments, the exclusion of kennel staff from euthanasia decisions, the lack of proper assessment of animals chosen for euthanasia, and low morale negatively impacting operation of the shelter.

Recent public outcry citing conditions at the shelter, recent litigation, and publicly circulated petitions calling for changes at the shelter suggest the previously expressed concerns remain. In addition to these publicly voiced concerns, the current Orange County Grand Jury received direct complaints requesting an inquiry. The Grand Jury determined a renewed investigation was warranted. The investigation focused on three major areas of concern: the management of the shelter, the welfare of animals under shelter care, and the communication and engagement with the public and the animal rescue community.

A particular concern of the Grand Jury was the shelter's termination of its Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR) program for community cats. In early 2020, the shelter decided to stop its TNR program. The Grand Jury's investigation determined that termination of the TNR program had detrimental consequences for the welfare of the animals under the shelter's care.

The elimination of the TNR program also has contributed to substantial public dissatisfaction and alienation that undermines the public's and the rescue community's relations with shelter leadership.

During the Grand Jury's investigation, it was reported by the shelter's senior management that the termination of the TNR program resulted from an opinion rendered by the County's legal counsel. Understanding the reason leading to the decision to terminate the TNR program would be important for considering whether the program can and/or should be reinstated. Toward that end, the Grand Jury endeavored to obtain a copy of the opinion of the County's legal counsel by directing a written request to the Chair of the Orange County Board of Supervisors. While the Grand Jury recognizes that the opinion may enjoy confidentiality pursuant to the attorney-client privilege, the Board of Supervisors has the discretion to waive that privilege. The Grand Jury's request included its commitment to maintain the confidentiality of the opinion itself and its contents. Nevertheless, the request was declined, as was the Grand Jury's alternative request that the County simply identify the legal authority reviewed in studying the issue.

Members of shelter management indicated their understanding the TNR program was terminated due to the opinion that the program violates a state law. The law makes it a crime to willfully abandon an animal notwithstanding that the program was designed to return cats to their original location rather than releasing them to randomly selected sites. TNR programs are widespread throughout California, not to mention the nation as set forth in a report from the American Bar Association. The Grand Jury is unaware of any published court case determining that a bona fide TNR program is prohibited under the anti-abandonment statute. Given the important benefits to animals and the public provided by such programs, the Grand Jury believes it would be prudent for the County to revisit the propriety of the former program and consider obtaining a second legal opinion.

This report highlights analysis of data provided to the Grand Jury by the shelter indicating that euthanasia rates related to dog behavior and to cats have increased significantly within the last two years. The increase in dog behavioral euthanasia rates suggests that there is inconsistency over time as to how dogs are being assessed and evaluated for behavior-related euthanasia. The increase in feline euthanasia rates appears to be correlated with elimination of the TNR program.

This report also addresses the challenges in maintaining quality staff at the shelter, especially in the Animal Care Attendant positions. Hiring practices for the shelter are too cumbersome, lengthy and lack consideration of how those practices impact animal welfare. Animal Care Attendant staffing at the shelter is inadequate and Animal Care Attendant staffing vacancies need to be filled more quickly.

This report discusses major deficiencies with each of the issues identified above and makes specific recommendations to help support a more engaged community. Status quo at the shelter is unacceptable. Appropriate remedial steps must be taken as animal welfare is paramount!

Finally, this report comments on the difficulties the Grand Jury encountered during its investigation. Without explanation, the entirety of the Orange County County Counsel's office determined itself to be conflicted with the Grand Jury's inquiry into Orange County Animal Care. The investigation was hampered and slowed during the six weeks the Grand Jury was required to arrange for outside legal counsel.

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