



Marcia Mayeda, Director

January 22, 2024

TO: Supervisor Lindsey Horvath, Chair
 Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
 Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell
 Supervisor Janice Hahn
 Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Marcia Mayeda, CAWA *Marcia Mayeda*
 Director

**REPORT BACK ON BOARD MOTION REGARDING
 EXPANDING ANIMAL CARE SERVICES IN THE ANTELOPE VALLEY
 (ITEM 63-D, AGENDA OF SEPTEMBER 26, 2023)**

On September 26, 2023, your Board instructed the Department of Animal Care and Control (Department) to report back in 120 days with a detailed plan to increase focused enforcement to mitigate and prevent illegal and backyard breeders, mistreatment of dogs and puppies, the release of unwanted dogs into the streets and shelters, and the illegal sale of dogs in both public and private locations.

Current Status of Dog Breeding in Los Angeles County

Los Angeles County Code Title 10 – Animals requires that all dogs be spayed or neutered with some exceptions. Implementing this critical law had a great impact on reducing the number of dogs and puppies admitted into Department animal care centers (ACCs). In 2005, the last year prior to adopting the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance for dogs, DACC admitted 42,395 dogs into care. That number dropped to 24,938 in 2018 prior to the implementation of alternatives to admission programming. In FY 22-23 DACC admitted 18,315 dogs.

Agoura ACC
 29525 Agoura Road
 Agoura Hills, CA 91301
 (818) 991-0071

Baldwin Park ACC
 4275 N. Elton Street
 Baldwin Park, CA 91706
 (626) 962-3577

Carson/Gardena ACC
 216 W. Victoria Street
 Gardena, CA 90248
 (310) 523-9566

Castaic ACC
 31044 N. Charlie Canyon Rd.
 Castaic, CA 91384
 (661) 257-3191

Downey ACC
 11258 S. Garfield Ave.
 Downey, CA 90242
 (562) 940-6898

Lancaster ACC
 5210 W. Avenue I
 Lancaster, CA 93536
 (661) 940-4191

Palmdale ACC
 38550 Sierra Highway
 Palmdale, CA 93550
 (661) 575-2888

Administrative Office
 5898 Cherry Avenue
 Long Beach, CA 90805
 (800) 253-3555

However during the COVID-19 pandemic several factors occurred that created an increase in dog breeding in Los Angeles County. Due to the lockdown, a great demand arose nationwide for puppies or dogs because people had the time at home to introduce and train a new family pet. Opportunistic people identified the market for puppies and began engaging in illegal dog breeding as a source of income.

Because of social distancing requirements, field enforcement of animal laws was limited to the most pressing public health and safety and animal welfare issues. These included capturing dangerous dogs, supporting law enforcement, and responding to animal cruelty cases. The COVID-19 budgetary staff curtailment in the Department left fewer officers to enforce County ordinances, including those regarding dog breeding.

The veterinary field was challenged because medical supplies were diverted for human uses during the pandemic. Veterinary medicine refocused its resources on only life-saving or critical surgeries. Spay and neuter surgeries were considered nonessential and deferred. More animals remained unsterilized and subject to accidental breeding.

Veterinary resource challenges continue post-pandemic. The national shortage of veterinarians has left fewer doctors available to perform surgery. These factors have led to an increase in unsterilized dogs. Obtaining affordable spay/neuter surgery remains extremely challenging and a major obstacle in reducing the number of unwanted litters born. Many people are willing to spay or neuter their dogs but cannot afford the cost or find an appointment for the surgery. This has resulted in unplanned and unwanted litters of puppies.

Enforcement of Illegal Dog Breeding

While Los Angeles County has strong laws in place to enforce this, the Department does not have the resources to identify the dog breeders. Illegal breeders advertise online and use nontraceable mobile telephones. It is a very labor-intensive duty to identify the breeder and location of their puppies, requiring hours of telephone calls, internet searches, physical meetings, and other investigative techniques to identify just one breeder that ultimately may not be in the Department's jurisdiction. When the Department is informed of a person breeding dogs, officers do enforce the laws regarding breeding as well as any other applicable laws.

There are some public opportunities where illegal dog breeding can be identified. Department animal control officers are actively involved in enforcement efforts at public swap meets, unhoused persons encampments, and other public spaces where illegal dog transactions occur. Violations of Los Angeles County Code Title 10,

Section 10.40.015, prohibiting the sale of live animals at swap meets, and California Penal Code §597.4 prohibiting the sale of live animals on any street, highway, public right-of-way, parking lot, carnival, or boardwalk are routinely enforced through targeted initiatives.

One such initiative is at the Antelope Valley Swap Meet. In response to several complaints, the Department's Major Case Unit, in collaboration with the City of Palmdale Code Enforcement, addressed violations resulting in the following notable outcomes:

July 16, 2023	3 animal control officers issued 7 citations, impounded 13 dogs
July 30, 2023	1 animal control officer warned and educated violators
November 19, 2023	3 animal control officers issued 2 citations
December 3, 2023	6 animal control officers issued 4 citations and impounded 1 cat
December 10, 2023	7 animal control officers issued 3 citations
December 17, 2023	5 animal control officers issued 4 citations
December 24, 2023	1 animal control officer issued 1 citation
December 31, 2023	1 animal control officer issued 2 citations

This operation will continue at the Antelope Valley Swap Meet and other locations--including the Santa Clarita and San Fernando swap meets--and throughout the South County in collaboration with the spcaLA, the Los Angeles County Nuisance Abatement Team (NAT), and city officials.

Partnership with Cities of Palmdale and Lancaster

Meetings with the Cities of Palmdale and Lancaster, along with public safety officials, have resulted in strengthened partnerships in the fight against illegal breeding. The Cities have reaffirmed their commitment to this collaboration, and their Code Enforcement units will work closely with the Department. The City of Palmdale has extended an invitation for our participation in outreach events to inform and educate their constituents.

Additionally, the Department's Vet@ThePark events attract some owners with litters of puppies. The purpose of the event is to provide low-cost and free vaccinations and other services to promote animal well-being. The Department seeks to balance the outreach component of its work to provide access to low-cost services with its enforcement responsibilities regarding people who illegally breed dogs for profit. While

enforcement of the breeding laws is not appropriate in this venue, Department staff will refer the names and addresses of pet owners who bred their dogs to the Department's officers for subsequent enforcement.

Public Education Campaign to Reduce Unwanted and Abandoned Animals

Raising public awareness of the inhumane conditions found in illegal and backyard dog breeding can help reduce the market for illegally bred puppies. Informing the public about the criminal penalties for animal abandonment can help reduce the number of unwanted dogs released into the community.

The Department is in the process of developing a tipline that allows individuals to report illegal dog breeding activities. A public awareness campaign will accompany this initiative with the dissemination of information through social media, press releases, posters, brochures, flyers, and decals on Department vehicles. These materials will emphasize the animal health and welfare concerns surrounding backyard breeding, with a particular focus on the potential for pet overpopulation and overcrowding in our ACCs and across Los Angeles County.

The tipline brochure and outreach information will include a QR code, direct phone number, and email address for anonymous tip reporting. It will cover information such as recognizing illegal dog breeding, risks of purchasing sick puppies, and concerns about inhumane treatment or conditions. We anticipate that educating the public about the dangers of acquiring animals through backyard breeding, as well as community engagement through reporting, will aid in reducing interest in acquiring puppies through backyard breeding.

Enforcement

Enforcing existing laws and regulations is vital in curbing illegal breeding activities. To strengthen enforcement efforts, the Department requires seven additional allocated animal control officer positions to enforce animal breeding laws. The Department will also:

- Collaborate with local law enforcement agencies, animal control agencies, and other relevant entities for a coordinated approach in identifying and shutting down illegal breeding operations as resources and partnerships allow.
- Request stricter penalties and fines, particularly for repeat offenders.

- Collect data on illegal breeding activities to ensure targeted and effective enforcement throughout Los Angeles County through the Department's new Power BI system.

Our partnerships with law enforcement, spcaLA, district attorney investigators, code enforcement, Department of Public Health, Department of Mental Health, and city officials and entities--including NAT--continue to strengthen our unified approach to enforcement.

Education and Outreach Initiatives

Educating the public about responsible pet ownership is crucial to prevent the demand for puppies acquired through illegal breeding. The Department will develop public informational materials to:

- Encourage responsible pet ownership with an emphasis on spaying/neutering.
- Highlight the risks associated with purchasing animals from unlicensed breeders exploiting vulnerable puppies for profit and the health concerns often found in puppies raised by illegal breeders.
- Inform the public of the importance of choosing reputable breeders for purebred purchases.
- Create a public awareness campaign discouraging purchases from illegal breeders and encouraging adoption from local shelters and rescues.

During routine calls for service, the Department's animal control officers distribute materials on outreach programs to provide support for pet retention, low-cost veterinary services, and information on reporting breeding or animal welfare violations through DACC's tipline or 24/7 communications center.

The resumption of the Department's door-to-door pet license enforcement program in January 2024--after a pandemic-induced pause--will facilitate direct engagement with pet owners and provide an additional avenue for in-person reporting. These officers will also distribute materials promoting the Department's programs.

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Budget Considerations

In June 2023, the Department presented a 5-year plan to reduce euthanasia to the Board. With these staffing resources, the Department could allocate animal control officers to their intended responsibilities in the field, enhancing enforcement of County Code and State law. These additional staffing positions are crucial for the successful operation of the tipline and the thorough investigation, enforcement, and prosecution of those involved in contributing to pet overpopulation through breeding.

The Department remains committed to making every possible effort within its allocated resources to meet its mission of helping the animals and residents of Los Angeles County.

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c: Chief Executive Office
County Counsel
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
Animal Care Board Deputies