



LOS ANGELES COUNTY

**ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL** | **redefining CARE**



Marcia Mayeda, Director

January 2, 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  
(ITEM 60-A, AGENDA OF DECEMBER 5, 2023)**

During the December 5, 2023, Board of Supervisors meeting, your Board directed the Department of Animal Care and Control (Department) to report back within 30 days on the following items:

A review of the policies and procedures related to the plea process and notification process for pending euthanasia of dogs. This should include appropriate timelines, and a plan for more robust communication and outreach to adoption partners, rescue, and foster organizations with proper documentation, as well as added use of social media platforms for appeals and notifications.

The Department requires that three plea notifications be sent to Department-registered Adoption Partners prior to the euthanasia of an animal. Exceptions may be made for unweaned puppies and kittens without a mother, an animal irremediably suffering from an illness or injury, or a dog with significant aggression that places public and animal health and safety at risk.

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

The first notification is sent as soon as the Department is aware the animal may need Adoption Partner assistance. There are different scenarios that prompt a notification to Adoption Partners. These include:

- Animals with medical or behavioral conditions that can be treated with behavioral and veterinary intervention beyond what the Department can offer.
- Animals who, from the date of admittance, are determined to be less likely to be adopted by the public due to age, behavior, or medical condition. Securing an Adoption Partner placement as soon as possible moves that animal on to new placement opportunities and provides room for more adoptable animals to stay longer in the care centers, receiving greater opportunities for adoption.
- Animals who have been offered for adoption to the public but have received no interest and the animal care center is pressed for housing space.

Notifications to Adoption Partners are generally issued a week apart. However, this time frame may be shortened if a care center is experiencing extremely high populations and housing capacity is very stressed. The purpose of the first two notifications is to alert the Adoption Partners that an animal needs adoption, so the Adoption Partner can identify resources to adopt the animal. The third notification is a 72-hour notification that alerts the Adoption Partners that the animal must be adopted within 72 hours or it may be euthanized. It has been the Department's experience that Adoption Partners normally only respond to the 72-hour notifications.

All notifications are documented in each animal's record, and any responses from Adoption Partners or other interested parties are also documented in the record. Most communications are conducted via email, and these communications are also maintained as records.

The Department relies on volunteers to post notifications on social media. Preparing posts--which include taking photographs and videos and describing the animal's personality, medical needs, and ideal home--are time and labor intensive. Additionally, monitoring the responses on social media is critical to ensure any interested parties are noticed and properly referred to the care center for adoption. The Department does not have staffing to expand this effort but will strive to grow its volunteer program to support this goal.

A review of the policy related to data and record keeping when euthanasia is used and recommendations to improve data collection.

The Department has updated its policy to confirm that the euthanasia of an animal must be recorded immediately after the procedure to ensure time stamps are reflected in real time.

Recommendations to enable visitors to view and access all adoptable dogs in the Palmdale and Baldwin Park Animal Care Centers without the need to be escorted by DACC staff.

The Palmdale Animal Care Center was designed with biosecurity best practices that include housing newly arrived animals away from public access while their health is assessed. This practice is particularly critical to prevent the spread of contagious diseases such as the new canine upper respiratory illness that is killing dogs across the nation. Sequestering the animals during their four-day holding period allows the medical staff to observe and treat any illnesses prior to offering the animals for adoption. It also provides the dogs with an opportunity to adjust to the animal care center environment quietly and without the stress of public traffic through their housing areas.

Nevertheless because of the insufficient number of adoptable dog kennels, adoptable dogs have been housed in the restricted area because of the Department's ongoing attempts to find placements for them. The Department posts photographs and descriptions of the adoptable dogs outside the restricted areas and on its website, and the public is escorted to view the adoptable dogs by staff or volunteers. The Department cannot allow unrestricted public access to these areas because unescorted visitors could also access restricted areas where controlled drugs, medicine, medical equipment, quarantined animals, and employee-only areas are.

If the Department can secure off-site housing for adoptable dogs, there will not be a need to house adoptable dogs in this area and the public will be able to view all adoptable dogs at the Palmdale ACC and off-site adoption center. Additionally, the Department is actively transporting adoptable dogs from the Lancaster and Palmdale ACCs to other ACCs with more holding space, thereby giving the public the opportunity to view them for adoption without restriction.

The Baldwin Park ACC allows full public access to all adoptable dogs that are housed in Buildings one, two, and three. Building four houses dogs that are not available for adoption. Half of that building houses dogs held pending the outcome of rabies quarantine observation, animal cruelty prosecutions, or vicious dog investigations. The

other half is reserved for stray dogs still within their medical observation period for biosecurity reasons and dogs that are not adoptable for other reasons such as, but not limited to, nursing mother dogs with puppies. Placing them with the general population would cause them to experience fear, anxiety, and stress.

An evaluation of best practices related to the behavioral assessment process to ensure that the most current training and tools are being utilized that will allow for consideration of dogs that enter the shelter in a state of fear.

The Department has invested heavily in staff and program development regarding canine behavioral assessments. The Department's Behavior and Enrichment Program was developed by professional animal trainers and handlers who specialized in shelter dog behavior, rehabilitation, and adoption. This leadership has enabled the Department to establish an effective program to best evaluate dog behavior and make suitable and safe placement recommendations.

The best practice of continual observation, rather than a single point in time assessment, is used to provide the most robust information about a dog's behavior. Each dog's behavior is monitored throughout their stay in the animal care centers as behavior can change, and the Department can gather more information about the dog over time.

There are also certain touch points where information is specifically gathered. These include any information provided by the previous owner who is asked to complete a canine admission form to provide detailed information about the dog's preferences, dislikes, training history, and more. Also, animal control officers may make observations regarding a dog's behavior in the field or gather information from the owner when taking custody of the dog.

Dogs admitted to Department ACCs undergo a medical examination after their arrival when--in addition to their physical exam, vaccinations, and treatments--they also receive a medical behavioral assessment and medical handling score between 1-5. This score informs the Behavior and Enrichment Team (BET) and animal care staff about the dog's fear, anxiety, and stress levels and any concerning behaviors. Dogs with a medical behavioral score of 3-5 are further assessed by BET in dog playgroups, allowing for a more detailed evaluation of their personality and sociability with people and animals. Throughout the dog's stay, staff may make notes of observed behaviors that can provide more information about the dog.

The Department has sought and taken advantage of ongoing training opportunities for staff regarding dog behavior. These include:

- The Fear Free Shelter training and certification program developed by internationally renowned veterinarian Dr. Marty Becker. This program provides key strategies and techniques designed to reduce the negative emotional states that are experienced by shelter animals and increase their enrichment opportunities. Topics covered include emotional health, recognizing animal behavior signals, how animals learn, and communication and handling skills.
- Dog play groups under the guidance of Dogs Playing for Life, a nationally recognized leader in establishing programming to provide canine behavioral enrichment play groups for dogs. These play groups relieve boredom and stress by allowing the dogs the opportunity to play in groups with other dogs. During play groups, BET staff can observe and note each dog's behavioral characteristics that can guide their adoption plan.
- The Shelter Behavior Training Series taught through the California Animal Welfare Association (CalAnimals). Topics included resolving behavioral problems to prevent surrender, reading dog and cat body language, reducing stress in the care center environment, and canine behavior assessments and behavior decisions.
- Dogs Trust USA Professional Development Program that covered dog body language, recognizing appeasement and displacement behavior, accurate description and reporting of observed behavior, how dogs learn, and meeting daily behavioral needs of dogs.
- Safety and Defensive Handling with Aggressive Dogs taught through CalAnimals. Topics included precautions to maximize safety for staff, how to safely work with dogs with histories of aggressive behavior, defensive handling techniques, and precursors of aggressive behavior.

The Department continuously evaluates industry best practices and makes modifications to its program to stay current. For example, recently the Department discontinued identifying specific child age groups for dog placement as this is not a factor that can be accurately tested in the animal care center environment. Limiting a dog's placement to a certain age group could be an unnecessary barrier to adoption. Instead the Department has begun classifying each dog's energy level as low, medium, or high. This information is used to inform prospective dog owners about what they can

expect from each dog and how that might impact any children living in the home. Through the Department's conversational adoption model, discussions are held with potential adopters to assist them in selecting the dog that is most suitable for their lifestyle.

Recommendations about using social workers to provide counselling and guidance to pet owners in need of assistance, who might otherwise surrender their animals.

The Department provides counselling and guidance to pet owners in need of assistance through its award-winning Pets Are Family (PAF) Program, which won a Top Ten award from the Los Angeles County Quality and Productivity Commission this year and a NACo Achievement Award in 2022.

PAF recognizes the important role pets play in people's lives by providing resources through key service delivery modules to keep pets and their families together and assist residents with pet-related issues. These resources include the CARE Voucher program, which provides financial assistance through vouchers for veterinary care; free pet food and supplies; community-based Vet@ThePark events to provide free vaccination, microchip, and flea/tick medication; and a medical helpline to provide information on pet care. The PAF Program also helps control pet overpopulation and promote public health by providing low-cost spay/neuter services to reduce the number of roaming animals. PAF has been instrumental in keeping pets and families together, maintaining the human-animal bond, and relieving the distress of separation. It is completely grant and donation funded, requiring no net County costs to support these services. It has been staffed by existing employees, which has placed further demands on their limited time.

Dedicated staff are necessary to provide more robust intervention services. A program manager is needed to develop resources and partnerships in the community to provide training, medical, housing, food, and other assistance. Intervention specialists are needed at the animal care centers to work directly with the public when residents arrive with animals or contact us for help.

In the Department's June 20, 2023, report to your Board, we recommended the hiring of Community Center Specialist II positions to serve as intervention specialists to provide counseling and guidance to pet owners in need of assistance to prevent the surrender of their pets. These positions are part of a recommended comprehensive plan to reduce euthanasia by offering intervention services and proactive outreach to the communities, identify and network with other public and nonprofit service agencies, and inform residents about Department services and how to access them.

Many times, owners surrender pets for reasons that can be remediated with services or supplies. Intervention specialists can connect or provide these resources to pet owners, allowing them to keep their animals and remove the need for admittance into an animal care center. Intervention specialists may also coordinate waived fees for pet owners who are looking to reclaim their pets but are unable to do so for financial reasons. These services call for personnel with counseling/social work backgrounds. The conversations with pet owners may require several conversations, securing resources, and dedicated time to support this function. Additionally, these specialists can contribute to follow-up and consistent data entry to ensure the services offered are being implemented and utilized in a measurable way that benefits the community.

The cost of one Community Center Specialist II is \$138,500. The cost for one Program Manager is \$214,889. The Department would require one program manager and two Community Center Specialist II positions each for Lancaster, Palmdale, Downey, Baldwin Park, and Carson/Gardena ACCs.

The Department is pleased to inform your Board that the Los Angeles County Animal Care Foundation, the Department's supporting 501(c)3 nonprofit partner, has just been awarded a one-year grant for \$80,000 from California for All Animals to retain a person to provide intervention/counseling services. This position will be allocated to the Antelope Valley region where the need is currently the greatest. The Department will closely track the impact of this position for future program development.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with your Board the ways in which the Department is addressing the many significant challenges that animal shelters across the country also face. The Department is 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