

Subject: Agenda Item S29H (July 18)

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Public Comment on Agenda Item S29H (July 18)

6.

I support the Findings and Recommendations of the Grand Jury on OC Animal Care. I urge the new appointee to work towards the implementation of the Findings and Recommendations

The Grand Jury Report on OC Animal Care can be found here:

https://www.ocgrandjury.org/pdfs/2022_2023_GJreport/Gimme_Shelter_and_a_Pound_of_Advice.pdf
<[>](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://www.ocgrandjury.org/pdfs/2022_2023_GJreport/Gimme_Shelter_and_a_Pound_of_Advice.pdf_)

Below is the intact text of the Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations. (I added yellow highlighting to what I found most interesting... and cyan highlighting to an important cat issue.)

FINDINGS

Management:

F1 Management has limited flexibility utilizing personnel within Orange County Animal Care across departments due to structured work rules, volunteer work restrictions, and employees working in departmental silos.

F2 Low staff morale exists within Orange County Animal Care.

F3 Orange County Animal Care staffing is negatively impacted by vacant positions remaining unfilled for greater than six months due to burdensome hiring processes. This delay in recruitment and completion of hiring has resulted in qualified candidates declining job offers.

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

F5 Orange County Animal Care's operating policies and procedures manual is out of date.

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.

Animal Welfare

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.

F8 The rate of behavioral euthanasia of dogs has increased significantly over the last 2 years.

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

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.

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

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.

Communication / Outreach

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

F14 Orange County Animal Care's engagement with some animal rescue partners is negatively impacted due to differences of opinion in appropriate animal care policy.

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

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.

Impediments to the Investigation

F17 The OC County Counsel's office misstated to the Grand Jury the scope of its commitment to serving and assisting the Grand Jury in its investigations into County governance respecting managing conflicts between the Board of Supervisors, OC departments and agency clients, and the Grand Jury.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Management:

R1 By October 1, 2023, OC Human Resource Services should review and update recruitment strategies to significantly increase the timeliness of recruitment of vacant positions and to anticipate vacancies due to retirement, resignations, transfers. (F3)

R2 By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should review hiring practices to facilitate process improvements to expedite filling OCAC vacancies. (F3)

R3 By October 1, 2023, OC Community Resources and Orange County Animal Care should review their current staffing allocations of Animal Care Attendants to reflect NACA guidelines and to provide appropriate staffing allocations for animal care, feeding and enrichment. (F3, F4)

R4 By October 1, 2023, OC Community Resources and Orange County Animal Care should review their current staffing allocations of all positions within the OCAC and reallocate resources to increase Animal Care Attendants to reflect NACA guidelines to provide appropriate staffing for animal care, feeding, and enrichment. (F3, F4)

R5 By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should review and update policies, procedures, guidelines, and practices to assure they are accurate and reflect current operating practices. (F5)

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. (F1 thru F16)

Welfare

R7 By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should establish written guidelines, policies, and procedures as standards for evaluating animal behavior for use by the Behavior Evaluation Committee. (F5, F7)

R8 By December 31, 2023, in the interests of transparency, Orange County Animal Care management should add a representative from a rescue organization to serve as a non-voting, at-large member on the Behavior Evaluation Committee. (F7, F14)

R9 By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should hire an animal behaviorist or certified dog trainers to work with aggressive animals to reduce the high rate of dogs being euthanized and enhance their adoptability. (F8, F9)

R10 By December 31, 2023, the Orange County Board of Supervisors and Orange County Animal Care management should request that County Counsel reconsider its opinion about the shelter's former Trap, Neuter, and Return program, or seek an independent second opinion to County Counsel's opinion, to ascertain whether the program can be re-established, or a modified version of the program can be implemented. (F10, F11)

R11 By July 1, 2024, Orange County Animal Care should implement a low-cost public spay/neuter program. (F12)

Communication / Outreach

R12 By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should hold all-hands staff meetings at least every quarter. (F1, F2)

R13 By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should conduct annual surveys of staff to monitor morale and identify opportunities for operational improvement. (F1, F2)

R14 By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should open the shelter to the public for walk-throughs to maximize opportunities for the public to adopt animals under the care of the shelter. (F13)

R15 By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should look for new ways to be more inclusive and engaged with volunteers and the rescue organizations that are necessary for the shelter's success. (F14, F15)

R16 By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care should schedule quarterly meetings with community stakeholders to facilitate transparency and engagement. (F14, F15)

R17 By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should update the information currently on its website for low-cost spay/neuter of feral cats with regard to referrals and prices for spay/neuter procedures. (F16)

Impediments to the Investigation

R18 Beginning with the 2023/2024 Grand Jury training, and all training thereafter, County Counsel should provide detailed instruction about the circumstances under which the County Counsel's office might recuse itself from assisting with Grand Jury investigations and the alternatives available to the Grand Jury under such circumstances. (F17)