



The Florida Senate

Interim Report 2009-101

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Committee on Agriculture

ANIMAL SHELTER RELATED FACILITIES

Issue Description

In Florida and across the country, the unavailability of pet adoptive homes and inability for municipal shelters to provide adequate space to house them has contributed to a large number of animals being euthanized. These shelters are run by a city, county or other public entity and are funded by taxpayer dollars. Their primary job is to pick up stray and nuisance animals and to reunite lost animals with their owners. In addition, they house many animals that are surrendered by their owners, who for various reasons are no longer able to care for them.

In recent years, there has been a trend toward establishing “low-kill” or “no-kill” municipal or private animal shelters in the state and around the country to try to end such a high rate of euthanization. The majority of these shelters are privately owned and funded by private donations. In these shelters, animals are euthanized only to alleviate the animal’s suffering or because the animal is too vicious to be controllable. Animals are not euthanized because there is not enough space at the shelter, because the animal is sick, handicapped, or unattractive, or if it has correctable behavioral problems.

A shelter’s successful transition to low-kill or no-kill involves aggressive adoption and foster care programs as well as teaching the community about the importance of spaying and neutering pets. In order to explore increasing the availability of no-kill, low-kill shelters, staff requested information from Florida shelters regarding current policies and procedures for care of animals and the numbers of animals that facilities were responsible for in 2007. A survey created with assistance from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Legislative Office of Economic and Demographic Research was sent to approximately 180 Florida animal shelters. The shelter locations were compiled with assistance from the Florida Animal Control Association, the Florida Association of Counties, the Florida League of Counties, and the Humane Society of the United States Southeast Regional Office. A total of 30 surveys were returned for analysis by committee staff and the Legislative Office of Economic and Demographic Research.

Background

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is the nation's largest animal protection organization with more than ten million members and constituents. The HSUS is a mainstream voice for animals, with active programs in companion animals, wildlife and habitat protection, animals in research, and farm animals. The HSUS protects all animals through legislation, litigation, investigation, education, advocacy, and fieldwork. A non-profit organization, the HSUS celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2004 and has regional representatives across the country.

Across the country and around the world, it serves local animal shelters and other groups by offering publications, training opportunities (such as the annual Animal Care Expo, a trade show and workshop conference specifically designed for animal care and control professionals), and advice and assistance. It also publishes recommended guidelines for shelter operations, shelter management, and

animal control and cruelty. The HSUS estimates that animal shelters care for between 6–8 million dogs and cats every year in the United States, of whom approximately 3–4 million are euthanized. At this time, the HSUS can only estimate these figures because there is no central data reporting agency for animal shelters.¹

The history of no-kill sheltering began more than half a century ago when independent caregivers began rescuing and sheltering homeless animals with the intention of keeping them alive. This was in reaction to the standard operating procedure of most humane societies and tax-supported animal control services that routinely euthanized stray and abandoned animals. These grassroots efforts by single or small loosely formed groups of caregivers typically operated independently of each other with no communication between facilities. These people were also considered rebels against society's traditional procedures of euthanizing homeless animals and were not popular with the traditional animal welfare establishment.

At the same time that in-home efforts to rescue animals began, carried out by individuals at their own risk and expense, other activists began to focus on ways to reduce cat and dog overpopulation. In the 1930s, the first focus on preventing unwanted animal births was initiated. These spay/neuter efforts coincided with the life-saving efforts of rescuers, and so the no-kill phenomenon began to expand. The dual development of humane activism, one preventive and the other grassroots remedial, began to address the crisis of unwanted animals being euthanized in shelters or pounds for lack of adoptive homes.²

In 1994, the city and county of San Francisco became the first community in the nation to end the euthanization of healthy dogs and cats in its animal shelter system. An agreement between the city's Animal Care and Control Department and the private San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) ensured a home not only to each and every healthy dog and cat, but to thousands who were sick or injured but treatable. In addition, a citywide preference for neutering/spaying over impounding and euthanizing reduced the death rate for feral cats by 73 percent and for underage kittens by 81 percent. In 1999, the Hayden Shelter Reform Law became effective. It changed California state policy regarding shelter care for stray and abandoned animals. Most notably it (1) declares "It is the policy of the state that no adoptable animal should be euthanized if it can be adopted into a suitable home," and (2) lengthens the time (generally from three days to six) that shelters must care for animals before euthanizing them.

An increasing number of cities and counties across the United States have either achieved the no-kill objective or are moving in that direction, either through local ordinances or public initiatives. In Chicago, Illinois, there is a consortium of shelters called the Chicago Animal Shelter Alliance (CASA) which are working together to make Chicago a no-kill city. In 2001, Tompkins County, New York, transitioned over a two-year period to a no-kill community and has been able to achieve a live release rate of over 90 percent every year since then. In New York City, the Mayor's Alliance for New York City Animals, similar to CASA in Chicago, involves public and private shelters working together to make New York City a no-kill city. In Kanab, Utah, a coalition of rescue groups called "No More Homeless Pets in Utah" is trying to move the state of Utah closer to a no-kill community. In the period from 1999-2006, the organization reported that the statewide adoption rate increased 39 percent while the euthanasia rate dropped 30 percent. An increasing number of other localities across the nation are implementing strategies to realize a no-kill objective within the next few years.

¹ <http://www.hsus.org>

² <http://maddiesfund.org/nokill>

In Florida, the Legislature has recently taken action related to animal shelters and the services they provide. Specifically, the 2008 Legislature passed the Gertrude Maxwell Save a Pet Act³, which creates the Gertrude Maxwell Save a Pet Direct-Support Organization within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. This direct-support organization was created for the purposes of providing grants to animal shelters for spaying and neutering animals, providing grants for shelters and services during times of emergencies, and developing and disseminating pet care education materials.

Findings

The Senate Agriculture Committee sent out 180 surveys to both municipal and private animal shelters around the state to gather information for this interim project. (Refer to Appendix A) A total of 30 were completed and returned. Staff from the Legislative Office of Economic and Demographic Research compiled this limited data. (Refer to Appendix B) The low number of returns may indicate reluctance by shelter staff to publicly reveal the number of animals brought to their shelters, the number adopted and the number euthanized.

The municipal shelters that responded received 48,558 dogs and 59,562 cats in 2007. The privately funded shelters that responded received 17,955 dogs and 26,925 cats in the same time period. These numbers indicate that municipal shelters received nearly three times more dogs and more than twice the number of cats than the privately funded shelters.

While there is a broad movement toward no-kill shelters in Florida, it is a reality that non-rehabilitatable and non-adoptable animals must be euthanized. The data that was received shows that municipal shelters euthanized 31,536 dogs and 55,894 cats in the year 2007. The privately funded shelters euthanized 5,735 dogs and 14,348 cats in the same time period. These numbers indicate that municipal shelters euthanized more than five times as many dogs and nearly four times as many cats as the privately funded shelters.

How Animals Left Shelters in 2007

The chart below provides a comparison of the data provided by municipal and private shelters illustrating how animals left the facilities in which they were housed.

	Claimed by owners	Adopted	Placed in foster care	Died of natural causes	Euthanized	Totals
Municipal Shelter Dogs	10,429 (17.2%)	13,050 (21.6%)	4,909 (8.1%)	599 (1.0%)	31,536 (52.1%)	60,523 (100%)
Private Shelter Dogs	849 (4.3%)	12,888 (65.4%)	149 (0.8%)	71 (0.4%)	5,735 (29.1%)	19,692 (100%)
Municipal Shelter Cats	1,303 (1.9%)	5,881 (8.8%)	2,726 (4.1%)	1,120 (1.7%)	55,894 (83.5%)	66,924 (100%)
Private Shelter Cats	282 (1.0%)	12,349 (44.5%)	617 (2.2%)	176 (0.6%)	14,348 (51.7%)	27,772 (100%)

³ s. 570.97, F.S.

Reasons for Euthanasia

The chart below provides a comparison of the data provided by municipal and private shelters illustrating the reasons that animals were euthanized in their facilities. However, caution must be used in comparing the reasons for euthanasia, because for some public shelters, local ordinances determine how long unclaimed animals are kept before being euthanized as compared to private shelters that may not have specific time frames. It is clear that the majority of animals that are euthanized in both public and private shelters either have health issues or are deemed to be unadoptable.

	Health issues	Unadoptable	Unclaimed after local policy time period	Other	Totals
Municipal Shelter Dogs	25.1%	35.6%	31.9%	7.4%	100%
Private Shelter Dogs	50.9%	32.3%	0.0%	16.8%	100%
Municipal Shelter Cats	28.9%	44.0%	18.2%	8.8%	100%
Private Shelter Cats	59.3%	20.5%	0.5%	19.7%	100%

Programs to Facilitate No-Kill/Low-Kill Shelters

The infrastructure for creating a no-kill, low-kill shelter must be created with the support of a community. It is imperative that humane societies and animal control shelters focus on incentives, not citations. Community leaders must be engaged to support and work toward this goal and to implement the programs and services described below, which have been identified as integral to the long-term success of no-kill/low-kill shelters.

Feral Cat Trap, Neuter, Return Programs (TNR)

Many animal control agencies in communities throughout the United States are embracing Trap, Neuter, Return programs to improve animal welfare, reduce death rates, and meet obligations to public welfare and neighborhood tranquility demanded by governments. These programs begin with the trapping of feral cats using humane cage traps. The captured feral cats are taken to a veterinary clinic where they are sexually sterilized. Typical TNR programs also involve providing the cats with vaccinations against certain diseases like rabies, feline panleukopenia, herpes, and calicivirus. Finally, the cats are marked so that they can be easily identified as a sterilized feral, usually by cropping the pointed end of the ear so that it has a square appearance or by cutting a notch at the tip or on the side of the ear. After the cat is sterilized and vaccinated, it is allowed to recover and then subsequently released to the site of capture.

High-Volume, Low-Cost Spay and Neuter Services

Spay/neuter is the cornerstone of a successful lifesaving effort. Low cost, high volume spay/neuter will quickly lead to fewer animals entering the shelter system, allowing more resources to be allocated toward saving lives. In the 1970s, the City of Los Angeles was the first to provide municipally funded spaying and neutering for low-income pet owners. A city study found that for every dollar invested in the program, Los Angeles taxpayers saved \$10 in animal control costs due to reductions in animal intakes and fewer field calls. Los Angeles shelters were taking in half the number of animals after just the first decade of the program and euthanization rates in the city dropped to the lowest third per capita in the United States. This result is consistent with results in San Francisco and elsewhere.

Rescue Groups

An adoption or transfer to a rescue group makes available scarce cage and kennel space, reduces expenses for feeding, cleaning, euthanizing, and carcass disposal, and improves a community's rate of lifesaving. Getting an animal out of the shelter and into an appropriate placement is important and rescue groups, as a general rule, can screen adopters as well or better than many shelters.

Foster Care

Foster volunteers take animals that are too sick, too young, or not socialized enough to be immediately adopted. They provide a safe environment for animals to mature, become more socialized, or heal from an existing wound or illness. After rehabilitation, the animal is returned to the shelter to await adoption into a new home. Foster care is crucial to a no-kill policy, and it increases an animal's chance of adoption. It is a low cost, and often no cost, way of increasing a shelter's capacity providing an opportunity for community members to volunteer. It also improves public relations, increases a shelter's public image, rehabilitates sick and injured or behaviorally challenged animals, and saves lives.

Comprehensive Adoption Programs

Adoptions are vital to an agency's lifesaving mission. If shelters are not convenient to the public, special adoption days should be advertised and the animals taken to areas where people will be attracted to the animals.

Pet Retention

There are numerous reasons pet owners surrender their animals to shelters. Pet retention techniques include having shelters work with people to help them solve their problems with the animals. Animal control agencies can maintain "libraries" of pet care and behavior fact sheets in the shelter and on a website. Articles in local papers, radio and television spots all provide opportunities to feature topics like solving litter box avoidance and excessive barking. Other pet retention programs include free in-home dog behavior problem-solving by volunteers, low-cost dog training, pet friendly rental programs, dog walker referrals, and pet behavior classes.

Medical and Behavior Rehabilitation

A shelter begins helping treatable animals by closely analyzing statistics. How many animals entering a shelter are treatable? What types of injuries and illnesses are most common? The answers to these questions will determine what types of rehabilitation programs are needed and how to effectively allocate resources. For example, one community may have many underage kittens in its shelters. Another may have substantial numbers of cats with upper respiratory infections, or dogs with kennel cough. Yet another may find that a large portion of treatables are dogs with behavior problems. Each will need a different lifesaving program. Dedicating funds to specific rehabilitation can let the public direct their donations and allow a shelter to demonstrate what they are doing to help treatables. Shelters can establish relationships with local veterinarians who would come to the shelter to supplement the work of staff veterinarians. In addition, a relationship with a veterinary college can allow veterinary students to volunteer at the shelter on a regular basis, providing the students with real life on-the-job training, while shelter animals receive high-quality care under the direction of the veterinary college faculty.

Public Relations/Community Involvement

Building a relationship with the community starts with redefining oneself as a "pet rescue" agency. Good, consistent public relations are the key to getting more money, more volunteers, more adoptions, and more community goodwill. A survey of more than 200 animal control agencies, conducted by a graduate student at the University Of Pennsylvania College Of Veterinary Medicine, found that "community engagement" was one of the key factors in those agencies who have managed to reduce euthanization and increase lifesaving.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of a successful no-kill effort. There is never enough staff, never enough dollars to hire more staff, and always more needs than paid human resources. In San Francisco, a community of approximately 800,000 people, volunteers spend over 110,000 hours at the shelter each

year. Assuming the prevailing hourly wage, payroll taxes and benefits, it would cost the San Francisco SPCA over \$1 million dollars annually to provide those services.

A Compassionate Director

Successful no-kill/no-kill shelters are highly dependent on a dedicated director and rigorous implementation of the major program and service components.⁴

Options

In recent years, there has been a trend toward establishing “low-kill” or “no-kill” shelters in the state and around the country, with the overall goal of reducing the high euthanization rate. The majority of these shelters are privately owned and funded by donations.

The Legislature may wish to consider several options related to current animal shelter related facilities. These options include (1) maintaining current state policy; (2) requiring veterinarians and government offices that provide rabies inoculation tags or certificates to make donation boxes available for public donations to support no-kill/low-kill shelters; (3) requiring shelters to report adoption and euthanization rates to the Legislature; (4) expanding grant recipients under s. 570.97, F.S., to include shelters that demonstrate improved performance; (5) expanding grant recipients under s. 570.97, F.S., to include shelters that implement key provisions of no-kill/low-kill best practices; and (6) establishing statewide shelter reform policy. Each of these options has advantages and disadvantages, and some have fiscal implications that are indeterminate at this time.

Option 1 - Make no changes to current state policy.

Option 2 - Amend s. 570.97, F.S., the Gertrude Maxwell Save a Pet Act, to require that any veterinarian that inoculates animals for rabies or any government office that provides rabies inoculation tags or certificates to make donation boxes available for public donations to support no-kill/low-kill shelters.

Option 3 - Amend s. 570.97, F.S., to require shelters to submit an annual report to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to be compiled into a statewide report and submitted to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives with the following information:

- Overall shelter capacity
- Number of animals admitted to the shelter
- Number of animals that have been adopted from the shelter
 - Number of adoptions by rescue groups
 - Number of adoptions by individuals
- Number of animals that have been euthanized
- Number of animals transferred to other facilities

Option 4 - Amend s. 570.97, F.S., to award grants to shelters that demonstrate a lower rate of euthanasia and an increased rate of adoption. In addition, amend the statute to require shelters that receive grant funds to submit an annual report to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to be compiled into a statewide report and submitted to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives with the following information:

⁴ <http://www.nokilladvocacycenter.org>

- Overall shelter capacity
- Number of animals admitted to the shelter
- Number of animals that have been adopted from the shelter
 - Number of adoptions by rescue groups
 - Number of adoptions by individuals
- Number of animals that have been euthanized
- Number of animals transferred to other facilities

Option 5 - Amend s. 570.97, F.S., to award grants to shelters that implement key components of no-kill low-kill shelters including:

- Feral cat trap, neuter, return programs
- Low cost spay/neuter programs
- Foster care
- Comprehensive adoption programs
- Strategies and assistance with pet retention
- Medical and behavior rehabilitation
- Building a relationship with the community and promoting community involvement
- Recruitment of volunteers

In addition, amend the statute to require shelters that receive grant funds to submit an annual report to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to be compiled into a statewide report and submitted to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives with the following information:

- Overall shelter capacity
- Number of animals admitted to the shelter
- Number of animals that have been adopted from the shelter
 - Number of adoptions by rescue groups
 - Number of adoptions by individuals
- Number of animals that have been euthanized
- Number of animals transferred to other facilities

Option 6 – Implement a statewide policy to address the high rate of euthanasia in shelters, similar to California’s Hayden Shelter Reform Legislation, Chapter 752, California Statutes. This law changed state policy regarding shelter care for stray and abandoned animals. Most notably it (1) declares “It is the policy of the state that no adoptable animal should be euthanized if it can be adopted into a suitable home,” and (2) lengthens the time (generally from three days to six) that shelters must care for animals before euthanizing them.