

April 2, 2017

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

Dear Supervisors,

I have served as a member of the AHA Oversight Committee since its inception as representative for the Santa Barbara dog shelter volunteers. I have volunteered at the shelter for nearly a decade. There has been some progress identifying and improving problems addressed by the AHA audit. But there are serious problems in our county's stewardship of animal welfare which were not included in the AHA report and thus are not discussed by the Oversight Committee. One example is the plight of dogs held at the shelter in protective custody while their owners work their way through the court system. These animals, often the victims of abuse, are re-victimized in custody as they are caged and isolated, not permitted to be handled or enriched by volunteers. There are simple remedies but no one at Animal Services has chosen to investigate and solve this injustice, which illustrates why we need to appoint an independent Animal Welfare Commission for Santa Barbara County.

In spite of the positive efforts and intentions of some employees, the entrenched culture and bureaucracy of Animal Services prohibits the implementation of progressive solutions for promoting animal welfare in our shelters. I have watched for a decade and worked with volunteers and animal groups to effect change in the operations of our county shelters, but little progress has been made. Santa Barbara County envisions itself as a leader in animal welfare but has done little to deserve that reputation. Now that we have two new voices on the Board, perhaps it is time to take a stride forward on animal welfare.

We need to commit to the formation of an Animal Welfare Commission and designate the current Oversight Committee to develop a proposal within three months to define what the commission will look like. This cannot be another advisory board like the current Oversight Committee, reporting to Animal Services who would then make all final decisions. The Animal Welfare Commission needs to represent the community at large and be staffed with members knowledgeable about animal welfare issues, and not be weighted toward any particular agency. The Commission should be equipped to resolve issues affecting county animals in a fair and unbiased fashion. Their actions will highlight problems needing solutions, increase awareness and invite input from the wider community. Our county is ready to evolve into holding the safety and health of local animals as a high priority which contributes to the well-being of all. The formation of a permanent Animal Welfare Commission, which is appointed by and reporting to the Board of Supervisors, will engage the public and facilitate progress in resolving issues affecting our Santa Barbara County animals.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Chris Erskine

AHA Oversight Committee Member, representing SB Shelter Dog Volunteers
Santa Barbara Shelter Volunteer for ten years
Voter in Das Williams' District