COSTA MESA POLICE DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lieutenant Greg Scott

FROM: Animal Control Officer Anna Rodriguez

SUBJECT: Commentary newspaper articles criticizing OCHS

DATE: November 29, 2015

My below commentary is in response to critiques against the Orange County Humane Society (OCHS), noted in news articles printed by the OC Register and Daily Pilot in November 2015. Although, admittedly, there are some areas for shelter operation improvements, some of the criticisms noted in the news articles were not consistent with my personal observations. I have listed allegations, in bold, made against OCHS in the articles, and then noted my personal observations and findings based on my training and professional experience with shelter operations.

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1. **Animal Control officers said they have witnessed Humane Society staff leaving dogs and cats in cages while they are being hosed down, "leaving the animals wet for several days," instead of removing the animals and then cleaning the cages.**

Some of the animals were extremely aggressive and cannot be moved very easily. The options are limited. Using a “ketch-all” pole can be stressful and a dog can get injured by biting the pole and breaking its teeth and biting its tongue. Tranquilizing a dog every time it defecates or urinates would also endanger the dog’s health. These dogs can also cause injury to personnel during removal. This issue was addressed last year when I saw a few dogs wet. I told the shelter manager and personnel to try their best not to get the dogs wet. When new personnel are assigned to our area they are told to try their best to keep the kennel area dry and free from excess water. To the best of my knowledge, this has no longer been an issue. Efforts have been implemented to keep the shelter dry by using large industrial fans and physically drying with squeegees.

2. **They also reported that some animals are housed in a building with no ventilation or sunlight, and cat cages are not scrubbed regularly.**

When the facility was designed, the biggest issue was security. The building was built with solid walls to avoid burglaries and pets getting stolen. The only windows put in that building were the louvered-type below the vaulted roof. Although the windows could be easy for burglars to access, since we have been there, no burglary incidents have occurred. The vaulted windows also keep cats from getting out of the building if they escape the cages. The structure of the building has not changed since Costa Mesa entered into an agreement with the shelter. Additional lighting and portable industrial fans have been used at the facility at the request of Newport Beach.

Scrubbing of cages occurs twice a day. During the evening cleaning, the volunteers assist. I have periodically asked the shelter staff to make sure cages, bowls, walls and floors are disinfected during these scrubbings. I have provided the special disinfectant for whatever parasites or viruses we happen to be addressing. Most of the food and water is not consumed between feedings.

3. **There is no quarantine area for sick cats, and food and water bowls are not cleaned regularly, according to the staff report.**

There is, in fact, a dedicated isolation (ISO) room that has always been used for housing sick and contagious cats. They are monitored and treated. During the outbreak of ring worm, the decision was made to treat 17 cats instead of euthanizing them. This issue was easily resolved by extending the treatment area to another building (C ward) which had been previously used for long-term police holds or long-term impounds.

<u>Additionally, Costa Mesa Animal Control Officers applied the following protocol:</u>

- Cats were diagnosed and treated.
- The animals in Ward C were relocated and only the cats with ring worm were housed in it.
- Each cat was in a separate crate.
- Each crate had food, water, and a litter box.
- The same personnel were restricted (authorized) to maintain the cats.
- The same dishes and boxes were left with each individual cat and not reused or exchanged.
- Cats were evaluated by a vet every week until there were no signs of ringworm.
- The available cat ward was closed to the public and sterilized. No cats were adopted out for a few weeks. Before the room was reopened, it was inspected.
- During this period, I personally suggested to cat owners, who were relinquishing their personal unwanted cats for adoption, to wait until the

available adoption room cleared. No citizens with strays were turned away from Costa Mesa. (Strays were held in a separate (D Ward) Animal Control building.)

- At the end of this outbreak, all dishes, crates and boxes were disposed of.
- After researching other protocols used by other shelters and attending a recent lecture by Dr. Lena Detar, a shelter medicine veterinarian, I concluded OCHS staff had followed the correct protocol. The only difference I found is there was an additional “by mouth” treatment (medicine) that could have also been used. All the cats recovered nicely. Two of the cats were re-infected, which is common. They since have recovered.

4. **The report alleged the Humane Society has been marking up the price of medicine for animals by 300%.**

This I could not comment on because all our treatment and medications are included in our contract.

5. **Residents have complained about the cleanliness of the facility and that the shelter's voicemail is often full, preventing them from leaving messages. The report states, "One of the goals of an animal shelter is to reunite lost animals with their owners, [and] it is in the spirit of efficient shelter operations to maintain an answering service/voicemail system equipped to accept an adequate number of messages to reunite lost animals with their owners quickly," Newport Beach police Sgt. Rachel Johnson wrote in a memo to the shelter on Sept. 30.**

Unfortunately, with the name “Orange County Humane Society”, the phone lines are extremely busy with pet questions from all over Orange County, and even bordering Los Angeles county cities. This causes a delay of response to the phone calls to our citizens. Since we no longer have a person answering our daily office line, we have routed all of our shelter service calls to them.

Another reason OCHS is so busy is due to the fact that the City of Newport Beach no longer handles any dog licensing at City Hall and has hired a company that keeps their licensing records and handles renewal notices. Since that company is in Texas, day to day licensing, for Newport Beach residents, has been referred to OCHS. Some of the duties are delinquent payments, obtaining a license the same day, or miscellaneous licensing questions to OCHS staff. This has caused another strain of the phone lines.

I have always observed the shelter receptionists giving their attention to the citizens who are there in person, requesting personal assistance. An owner redeeming a pet or adopting a pet can take 20 to 30 minutes from start to finish. With having a lot of Animal Control phone experience, I know how difficult it is to

satisfactorily handle phone requests, when we previously staffed a full complement of three full-time Animal Control Officers along with a dedicated, part-time secretary to fulfill all telephone needs.

6. **One news article mentions a memo that detailed several issues the Newport Beach Police Department believed violated the OCHS contract with their city, which included turning away owner-relinquished cats.**

This I know is not true. The shelter staff has been instructed by Newport Animal Control to ask for pre-approval from Newport Animal Control Officers, prior to accepting any strays or owner relinquished pets.

During the ring worm outbreak period, the shelter staff was specifically instructed by Newport Beach ACOs not to accept any cats from Newport Beach. This is the only instance I am personally aware of in which stray and owner-relinquished cats were turned away by shelter staff.

7. **The OC Register article reported that out of 62 drains, 31 drains had missing covers.**

I drove to the shelter and inspected the drains and did not find any missing drain covers either in the adoption ward or the Animal Control ward. I asked the shelter manager what the article was referring to. She said “two” covers were missing and replaced with covers removed from unoccupied kennels in the C Ward. Additional replacement covers were ordered, but there were never 31 covers missing.

The City of Newport Beach has a very low impound rate and has never had the need to contract with a large shelter. They have fit in well contracting with small veterinary offices in the area.

Most veterinarians do not like to contract with Animal Control Agencies because of all of the different customer service issues that interfere with their daily business. These issues, coupled with their rising contract costs, has led Newport Beach to leave three veterinary hospitals in the past 27 years. Each time they have left a veterinary hospital, it was over similar issues.

I would like mention that the City of Costa Mesa services a large population of animals every year. In comparison to other animal shelter facilities, OCHS offers our pets and pet owners a better service compared to other animal shelters available to service our needs.

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ANNA RODRIGUEZ
Animal Control Officer