



RON GALPERIN  
CONTROLLER

September 3, 2015

Honorable Eric Garcetti, Mayor  
Honorable Michael Feuer, City Attorney  
Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council

Dear Colleagues:

**Re: Every Animal Counts: Assessing Los Angeles' Progress Toward Becoming a "No-Kill" City**

How we treat animals reflects our values as a society. We can and should be judged on how well we treat the most vulnerable among us, including those who can't speak for themselves.

I believe that every animal should be well-cared for and that the City's Department of Animal Services has an important role to play in assuring animal welfare. And any animal killed that doesn't have to be is a loss to be mourned. And so I believe that we, as a City, need to move with all due haste to become the "No Kill" City we have long purported to want to be.

**Failing to Live Up to Our Values**

There are varying opinions about what "No Kill" means. Some define "No Kill" as a state in which no healthy, adoptable animals are killed and in which, as a result, 90% to 95% of animals are expected to leave City shelters alive. The Department of Animal Services says it and a coalition of more than 70 animal care organizations are targeting a goal of 85% to 90% of dogs and cats leaving shelters alive by 2017.

In 2003, then-Mayor James K. Hahn publicly set a goal of making Los Angeles a "No Kill" city by 2008.

It didn't happen.

It still hasn't.

### **One of Four Animals in City Shelters is Euthanized**

Last year, statistics published by the Department of Animal Services show that about one of every four lost or abandoned animals that entered the City's six animal shelters was euthanized. In real numbers, that meant 14,083 of the 57,225 animals that entered the City's shelters last year were euthanized. Albeit better than the approximately 30,000 animals being killed annually more than a decade ago, we are still killing far too many animals.

These sad facts remain:

- The City of Los Angeles killed 8,018 cats, 4,664 dogs and 2,346 other animals in FY 2013-14. (Animals in the "other" category can range from rabbits to roosters to turtles to snakes.)
- The largest single group to be euthanized was newborn cats. Department records show 4,436 cats who were less than eight weeks old were killed. By contrast, just 80 newborn dogs were euthanized. Officials explain that newborn cats are particularly susceptible to diseases and need to be fed every two to three hours around the clock, which they say is not possible because there is not enough staff or foster care options available. Officials say the alternative would be to let them starve to death.
- A minority of the animals euthanized—1,398 cats and 1,389 dogs— were killed because of what the Department defined as irremediable suffering, generally meaning they were described as being in pain from conditions that were likely incurable.
- Another 929 cats and 1,183 dogs who were described as suffering from less extreme medical problems were also euthanized.
- Yet another 623 cats and 588 dogs were euthanized because they were deemed dangerously aggressive.
- Finally--and perhaps most sadly--414 cats and 1,231 dogs were euthanized because shelters ran out of space.

**Three-Year Trend Shows Declines in Euthanasia**

Summary statistics provided by the Department, and reflected in the charts below, show that, over the three most recent years auditors reviewed, fewer cats and dogs were being euthanized in most categories each year.

**CATS**

Euthanasia Reason/Condition	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14
Lack of Space	911	572	414
Irremediable Suffering	1,789	1,648	1,398
Unmanageable Medical Problems	1,027	952	897
Solvable Medical Problems	425	135	32
Behavioral Problems	2,171	1,513	623
Less than 8 weeks old	5,998	5,686	4,436

**DOGS**

Euthanasia Reason/Condition	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14
Lack of Space	2,417	1,421	1,231
Irremediable Suffering	1,968	1,700	1,389
Unmanageable Medical Problems	1,667	1,478	1,173
Solvable Medical Problems	238	58	10
Behavioral Problems	2,305	1,197	588
Less than 8 Weeks Old	170	223	80

And so, it appears that some progress is being made. Just not fast enough. In FY 2014-15, the Department reported continuing declines--with a decline in the number of cats euthanized from 8,018 to 7,856, a drop of two percent; and a decline in the number of

dogs euthanized from 4,664 to 3,880, a drop of 17%. The number of other animals euthanized held steady, moving only from 2,349 to 2,347.

### **Skeptics Wonder; Auditors Check**

Some animal advocates have expressed skepticism about whether the Department's statistics—many of which are published monthly-- can be believed. Because this is such a serious subject, and because advocates' concerns raised important questions about accountability, I asked auditors from my office to evaluate the Department's record-keeping.

The Department tracks animals statistically from the time they enter shelters to the time they exit. Auditors from my office reviewed three years of such statistics from Fiscal Years 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

While auditors found some procedural problems in the way the Department collects its statistics and recommended ways for the Department to improve, they concluded overall that the Department's reported statistics were reasonably accurate. There was one exception that interestingly did not have to do with tracking animals who enter shelters. In its public reporting, the Department dramatically understated one of its accomplishments—the large number of animals it had a hand in sterilizing in efforts to guard against later having to euthanize their offspring. Sterilization has been the law in Los Angeles since 2008 and is widely regarded as a key to a successful "No Kill" program. But in reporting sterilization figures, the Department failed to include thousands of publicly-subsidized sterilizations performed by private veterinarians on the City's behalf.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The report of my office being released today recommends greater transparency and urges the Department to publish more detailed statistics on the ages of animals in shelters and the health of animals adopted, rescued and euthanized. The Department keeps some of these statistics now – such as the health status of animals who are to be euthanized—but does not routinely make them public. It should.

I also have three additional recommendations:

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- We need to devise a realistic and believable plan to make Los Angeles a "No Kill" city as soon as possible. To do that, of course, presupposes stakeholder agreement on what we mean by "No Kill."
- Lack of space should never be a reason to put an animal to death. The Department should pursue alternatives, including forming more partnerships with private shelters.
- We need to ensure that the Department has adequate resources and personnel.

On behalf of my office--and of my beloved dog, Daisy--I want to acknowledge the many hard-working City employees who dedicate themselves to the welfare of animals and the many people City-wide who volunteer their time. I also want to formally thank the Department of Animal Services for its cooperation in our audit.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Galperin", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Ron Galperin  
CITY CONTROLLER