

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Ann-Marie Lariccia

**Date Submitted:** 05/03/2026 11:24 PM

**Council File No:** 26-0600

**Comments for Public Posting:** Please renew Dogs Play For Life contract 2026-2027. This program is essential & not optional for the well being of staff, volunteers, the public and dogs. Our shelters are busting at the seams with too many animals & never enough cleaning or volunteers to safely take them all out. DPFL is the most cost effective strategy for the safety of staff, volunteers, public and dogs. There is no way to downplay the crisis that we are in and making this cut would negatively impact our communities. DPFL is an organization that has proven to be professional, knowledgeable, flexible, and most importantly, demonstrated the importance of playgroups. Please do not take away this highlight in a such dim situation.

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Margaret Price

**Date Submitted:** 05/01/2026 09:19 PM

**Council File No:** 26-0600

**Comments for Public Posting:** Dear Councilmember, As a constituent and an Angeleno who cares about our city's shelter dogs, I'm writing to urge you to fully fund the Dogs Playing for Life (DPFL) contract in the 2026-27 budget. DPFL playgroups are the only structured out-of-kennel time most LA shelter dogs ever get. Without them, dogs sit in concrete kennels 24 hours a day — no walks, no play, no joy. The Department's own interim GM, Annette Ramirez, warned the Committee in writing on April 21 that cutting DPFL will negatively affect shelter dogs' physical and behavioral health, decrease adoptability, and increase bite risk to staff, volunteers, and visitors. The DPFL contract costs less than 1/100th of 1% of LA's \$14.85B budget — a small fraction of what the city has paid in dog bite settlements over three years. Cutting it converts a small, predictable cost into unpredictable liability. Please vote to restore DPFL funding before the Committee report on May 15. Thank you, Margaret Price Winnetka CD3

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Dogs Playing for LIfe  
**Date Submitted:** 05/04/2026 08:10 AM  
**Council File No:** 26-0600  
**Comments for Public Posting:** DPFL Impact and Outcomes for LAAS document attached.



## FROM CONTAINMENT TO CARE

### DPFL at LAAS

Beginning in 2022, two Dogs Playing For Life (DPFL) Canine Enrichment Coordinators at the Los Angeles Animal Services (LAAS) Chesterfield Square Shelter (SLA) quickly demonstrated what was possible once consistent playgroups and out-of-kennel enrichment were established - healthier dogs, improved behavior, and a more humane daily experience.

In 2022, an average of 685 playgroup entrances per month reflected a program in its infancy with limited out-of-kennel enrichment capacity for such a large population of dogs. This early success led to the program today which has grown to 15 dedicated full time staff members including 13 skilled Canine Enrichment Coordinators, fundamentally reshaping the experience of LAAS' dogs while setting a new standard for humane care within large municipal shelter systems. DPFL's embedded programming has resulted in **over 100,000 playgroup entrances** across all six LAAS facilities, with **over 13,750 unique dogs handled** by DPFL since our arrival!

DPFL programming has demonstrated that enrichment is not an added benefit, it is foundational to humane care, staff safety, operational efficiency, and adoption success. DPFL has helped LA move from a system of containment to a system of active, evidence-based care.

### Growth & Position Expansion

- Expanded from **2 to 15 full-time positions**
- Now active across all six LAAS shelters
- Represents a fully embedded out-of-kennel enrichment program

### Daily Operational Impact

- An average of **275 LAAS dogs per day** are receiving out-of-kennel enrichment via playgroups
- An average of **485 unique dogs** are handled by the DPFL teams monthly
- Expansion from pilot-level activity to a sustained, high-volume programmatic solution

### Program Growth

- **2022:** 685 playgroup entrances/month
- **2026:** 5,500+ playgroup entrances/sessions/month
- **8x growth** in access to out-of-kennel enrichment for LAAS dogs via playgroups
- Projected **65,000 playgroup entrances in 2026 alone**



## Without DPFL on the Ground at LAAS

### Significant Reduction in Out-of-Kennel Enrichment (OOK)

Records indicate that the majority of LAAS dogs are being handled and enriched by DPFL teams and that reliance upon volunteers alone to provide OOK will result in many more dogs remaining confined:

- **37% of large dogs (30lbs+) across all LAAS shelters**
  - Have participated in playgroup but have not been walked by volunteers
    - Approximately 250 dogs would remain in their kennels without playgroups
  - **At South LA Shelter, this figure rises to 64%**
    - Approximately 100 dogs would remain in their kennels without playgroups
- **Playgroups are serving as the primary (not supplemental) out-of-kennel enrichment opportunity and a significant portion of dogs are:**
  - Not walked by volunteers
  - Only receiving critical out-of-kennel time through playgroups

### Reduced Bite Frequency and Severity

Comparing 2025 to the previous year, Los Angeles Animal Services saw a significant increase in playgroup participation alongside a meaningful decrease in bite frequency:

- ✓ Playgroup entrances increased by 118% (more than doubled!)
- ✓ Total reported bites decreased by 17%
- ✓ Minor bites decreased by 28%
- ✓ Severe bites decreased by 33%
- ✓ Medium bites remained unchanged

Even as dogs are given more than twice the opportunity to engage with caregivers, the overall rate of bite incidents has declined, demonstrating improved safety, handling, and program effectiveness at scale.

## Considerations for Leadership

### Stress Reduction = Improved Immune Response

**Regular out-of-kennel enrichment reduces stress in shelter dogs, which can contribute to improved health, lowering medical burden.**

- Chronic kennel stress is a known contributor to illness, particularly upper respiratory infections (URI) and intestinal issues
- Dogs who participate in regular playgroups can experience lower stress levels, which supports stronger immune response
- Reduced illness leads to:
  - Lower medical costs
  - Shorter lengths of stay
  - Improved overall herd health

**Enrichment is not just a quality-of-life improvement, it is a preventative health strategy.**

### Enrichment Improves Safety and Handling Outcomes

**Consistent out-of-kennel enrichment can reduce behavioral deterioration, making dogs safer and more predictable to handle.**

- Dogs deprived of out-of-kennel enrichment can deteriorate behaviorally or existing behavioral concerns can be exacerbated
- Prolonged kenneling increases:
  - Reactivity
  - Stress-induced behaviors
  - Handling risk for staff and volunteers
- Regular play and social interaction helps dogs:
  - Maintain behavioral stability
  - Cope and thrive in high-stress environments

**Enrichment is a risk mitigation tool, not just an activity.**



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## Enrichment = Adoptability and Positive Engagement

**DPFL's out-of-kennel enrichment promotes dogs' sociability, and enhances their visibility, improving their opportunities for adoption.**

- Even social dogs can decline behaviorally when kenneled for extended periods
- Playgroups provide opportunities for dogs to:
  - Demonstrate their true personality
  - Engage positively with other dogs and people (not just viewed in their kennels)
- Dogs with enriched routines show:
  - Better kennel presence
  - Increased interest from adopters

**Enrichment is often the difference between a dog being overlooked vs. selected.**

## DPFL Playgroups Can Function as a More Comprehensive Assessment Tool

**Playgroups create a continuous, real-time behavioral observation system that improves decision-making and outcomes.**

- Every playgroup acts as an opportunity for more comprehensive and ongoing behavioral observations
- Skilled DPFL Canine Enrichment Coordinators assess:
  - Stress levels upon the dogs arrival at the shelter and during their care
  - Play style and social preferences
  - Dog tolerance and compatibility
  - Responses to environmental stimuli
  - Comfort with familiar and unfamiliar humans
- This information is used to:
  - Guide individualized enrichment and pathway plans
  - Identify potential safety risks early
  - Provide valuable insights to LAAS staff
  - Help make informed euthanasia decisions

**Positive behavioral observations create compelling adoption narratives.**



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## DPFL Increases Workforce Skill and Reduces Risk

**DPFL strengthens staff capability while reducing handling risk and training costs.**

- Animal welfare organizations often struggle to recruit and retain highly skilled canine handlers
- DPFL's skilled Canine Enrichment Coordinators provide:
  - Hands-on training and mentorship
  - Daily modeling of best practices
  - Consistency in handling and training approaches
  - Critical safety training for staff and volunteers
- This contributes to:
  - Improved staff confidence and competency
  - Reduced risk of injury or mishandling
  - More efficient and effective operations

**DPFL is not just filling roles, it's elevating the entire system's efficacy.**

## DPFL Expands Staffing Capacity in a Cost-Effective Way

**DPFL effectively increases LAAS's operational capacity with highly trained personnel at a critical time.**

- DPFL provides teams of skilled caregivers across six care centers
- This expansion:
  - Increases the system's ability to deliver daily out-of-kennel enrichment to more dogs
  - Helps manage large dog populations more safely and efficiently
- At a time when:
  - Hiring is challenging
  - Budgets are tightening
- DPFL represents a cost-effective staffing solution that improves and maintains humane standards
- 37% of large, 30lbs+ dogs across all LAAS care centers have not been walked by volunteers (approximately 250 dogs) but have been to playgroups.

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- At SLA (the department's most challenged care center) approximately 64% of dogs are not walked by volunteers, but are provided out-of-kennel enrichment through playgroups.
  - [What is the alternative?](#)
    - When SLA was at nearly 200% capacity, to provide every eligible dog a 10-minute outing in a small pen or one of the play yards (since there is no place to walk dogs), it would require 10 people getting dogs out 8 hours straight with no breaks.

**In Conclusion:** Continued partnership between LAAS and DPFL promises to stand as an industry leading example of humane canine care in even the largest municipal systems.



## Communication from Public

**Name:** Bill T

**Date Submitted:** 05/04/2026 08:22 AM

**Council File No:** 26-0600

**Comments for Public Posting:** Please renew Dogs Play For Life contract 2026-2027. This program is essential for the well being of staff, volunteers, the public and dogs. Our shelters are bursting at the seams with too many animals & never enough cleaning or volunteers to safely take them all out. DPFL is the most cost effective strategy for the safety of staff, volunteers, public and dogs. There is no way to downplay the crisis that we are in and making this cut would negatively impact our communities. DPFL is an organization that has proven to be professional, knowledgeable, flexible, and most importantly, demonstrated the importance of playgroups. Please do not take away this highlight in a such dim situation.