



## ***WET KENNELS AND LOW MORALE ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL REPORT***

### ***Summary***

Several problems found through previous oversights of the Mendocino County Animal Care and Control Department (ACC), particularly in the areas of management, staff training, and public service, continue to cause concern within the County. Care of animals and euthanasia protocols at the Ukiah facility also surfaced as issues in the course of this year's investigation. Recommendations include new and previously stated ideas for improvements.

### ***Background***

The Animal Care and Control Complaint Report, published recently by the 2004-2005 Grand Jury, dealt with a specific incident at the Ukiah facility. During the course of that investigation, however, the Grand Jury was alerted to other problems, some of long standing, which seem endemic at the facility. An unhealthy hierarchy of retribution and intimidation between management and staff seems to pervade the entire ACC. County employees, past employees, professionals and volunteers in animal care and the community at large all recognize the need for change in this County Department and express hope that the Board of Supervisors will step forward to exercise their oversight responsibility.

### ***Methodology***

The Grand Jury interviewed a number of persons both directly and indirectly associated with the ACC, County officials and various clients of the Department. The Jury toured both the Ukiah and Fort Bragg facilities and consulted both State and County documents regarding animal control and welfare, including reports published by prior Grand Juries.

### ***Findings***

1. In the past, the Board of Supervisors has exercised only indirect oversight of the ACC; oversight and evaluation responsibility was assigned to the County Administrative Officer, but neither the intent of the Board nor the oversight practices of the CAO's office has been apparent to the public.
2. A flawed management style in which both favoritism and intimidation are used to keep employees unsettled creates a culture of fear at the ACC which affects work efficiency, staff interaction and, inevitably, treatment of the animals housed at the facility.
3. The ACC Policies and Procedures manual omits or imprecisely describes many procedures which are performed frequently, even daily, by



staff and/or volunteers. (See **ACC Complaint Report 2004-2005 Grand Jury.**)

4. As a result of Finding 3, there is a potentially dangerous gap between procedures and “practices”. The “practices” are described by employees as verbal or understood instructions which vary in application and consistency.
5. Education and training of ACC employees is sporadic and inconsistent; some employees may receive formal training, others receive informal and often insufficient training onsite, still others receive little or no training for mandatory tasks.
6. There are no funds in the latest ACC budget allocated to education and training. While it is possible that this is the result of a bookkeeping procedure, it may also reflect the lack of priority given to these activities within the Department.
7. CHAMELEON, a highly rated, complex and expensive software specifically designed for use by agencies such as ACC, is underused by the County Department, primarily due to a lack of employee training.
8. While the ACC advertises itself as “working towards eliminating euthanasia”, there is no stated and transparent policy regarding the definition of an “adoptable” animal. Which employees make these decisions and what guidelines are followed are not clear; the “unadoptable” animal faces euthanasia.
9. The situation described in Finding 8 makes it impossible to measure the degree to which ACC euthanizes animals which private animal shelters and rescue groups might judge as adoptable.
10. Euthanizing animals as a necessary professional activity is rated statistically as one of the most stressful tasks an employee is asked to perform. There is no evidence that ACC offers any formal counseling and/or debriefing to employees who must routinely euthanize animals at the Ukiah or Fort Bragg facilities.
11. Both the ACC Administration and numerous additional witnesses have testified that generating revenue is the primary goal of the department.
12. Beds, although available, are not used in the Ukiah ACC facility, forcing dogs to sit, stand and lie on cold, often wet, concrete floors. This situation, which can be injurious as well as uncomfortable, arises because facility attendants complain of extra work required in cleaning cages which contain beds.



### ***Recommendations***

1. The Grand jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors ensure the formation of a Citizen's Advisory Committee to oversee the Department of ACC. (Findings 1,2)
2. The Grand Jury recommends that the Ukiah ACC facility utilize the beds at their disposal; dogs in all cages must have a dry place off the concrete available to them. (Finding 12).
3. The Grand Jury recommends that the ACC give education and training for employees a high priority in budget expenditures; a skilled, proficient staff should mean a more efficient use of ACC software and equipment and reduce staff turnover in the Department. (Findings 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
4. The Grand Jury recommends that the ACC institute formal stress management procedures to meet the needs of those staff members who are involved in the euthanasia process. (Finding 10).
5. The 2003-2004 Grand Jury recommended that the ACC "develop a positive working relationship with the Humane Societies." These non-profit groups were encouraged to reciprocate. This Grand Jury reiterates this recommendation and, in addition, strongly urges the ACC to utilize licensed, non-profit animal shelters and rescue groups in a concerted effort to promote adoption rather than euthanasia. (Findings 8,9, 12).

### ***Comments***

The management of the ACC appears to be primarily committed to showing a profit, in contradiction to its Mission Statement. This may explain the ACC's reputation in the animal welfare community as more interested in collecting fees from those groups offering adoption services than in finding good homes for as many animals as possible.

Too many clients are met with hostility and rudeness at the front desk of the Ukiah facility; too many employees serve multiple probations which seem more a means of staff control than a time for education and training; too many directives to employees are verbal and inconsistent rather than clearly codified in written form to which all can refer; too many animals are designated as "unadoptable" for reasons that are unclear and/or arbitrary.

It is true that the Board of Supervisors has the ultimate responsibility for the management philosophy and style of every County Department. As stated in



County of Mendocino  
Grand Jury

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Recommendation 1, however, the Grand Jury strongly urges the Board to form a community advisory committee to facilitate public scrutiny of a troubled Department.

***Responses Required***

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

***Responses Requested***

County Executive Officer  
Director, Mendocino County Animal Care and Control  
President, Mendo-Lake Veterinary Medical Association