



Danville Area Humane Society

March 28, 2017

Board Members
Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services
c/o Kevin Schmidt, Secretary
Via e-mail

Dear Board Members:

Last Thursday, I intended to come to Richmond to testify during the public hearing on the regulatory proposal pertaining to the operation of private animal shelters. Unfortunately, I was sick and could not come. Please accept this as my testimony in support of the regulations put forth.

I am in a unique position because I am the director of and humane investigator for the Danville Area Humane Society. Since 1984, we have operated the public animal shelter for the City of Danville; we actually built most of the shelter and gave it as a gift to the City. We are open-admission and turn away no animals, even those we know we cannot find homes for. If we did not accept them, where would they go?

Please allow me to relate several points to you, all of which support our belief that quotas and percentages can never take into account all of the issues that come with animal shelters.

1. In 2012, we built an adoption center onto the public animal shelter. This is listed as a private animal shelter on the annual animal report listed on the VDACS website. This shelter receives animals in only one way – we transfer animals we know we can find homes for from the public shelter. All animals received go into the public shelter first. The ones transferred to the private shelter remain in the adoption center until they are adopted or transferred to one of our adoption partners (shelters, rescue groups, etc.), as long as they have no health issues or behavioral issues. We still have adoptions from the public part of the shelter.

We have been criticized on-line and in letters to the editor because we accept so few animals into the private shelter. Still, our 0% euthanasia rate in the private shelter was praised last year in the General Assembly by people demanding euthanasia quotas.

This year, we helped with the seizure of over 50 cats from two hoarding cases. One case actually involved a foster home for two rescue groups! We were given custody of the cats in General District Court proceedings as required by law. The cats had herpes infections, calicivirus infections, and severe upper respiratory infections. Despite the best practices by our employees, the diseases spread and we had many cats in our private shelter infected. On the advice of three veterinarians, we had to euthanize many of the cats in our private shelter. We also had older dogs have significant issues as a result of their age and we also euthanized them. We diligently reported those numbers on our annual report.

Perhaps the same day our reports were posted, we saw on-line comments on social media sites about how we could no longer call our adoption center “no-kill” since our save rate was only 92%, when “everyone knows that you can’t be no-kill unless your save rate is 95%.”

2. We are grateful for our adoption transfer partnerships. However, when they come to the shelter, they take our small dogs and the generally healthy ones. They do behavioral testing and do not accept ones that do not pass the test.

3. We know from personal, real-life experience that public and private shelters decrease euthanasia numbers by simply decreasing the number of animals accepted. One woman, over the course of many weeks, brought over 50 cats to us from over an hour away from Danville because she could not find any shelter that would accept them. We receive dogs, birds, guinea pigs, and all other companion animals from many localities because we do not turn away any animal.

4. A couple of shelters (one private, one public) come from hours away to take friendly cats from us because they do not accept stray cats from their areas.

5. The USDA called us for help last summer. On one of their protected animal properties, they had many feral cats that people fed. They wanted them removed from the sensitive wildlife areas, but the public animal shelter in their area would not accept them. They called all shelters within a certain radius, but all of their pleas for help were rejected. They found my number through our website. We agreed to accept them. We were paid \$250 per trip to meet the expenses of paying an employee to make the trip, paying another employee to cover the shelter, as well as vehicle expenses as the cats were trapped. We were paid by checks from the locality whose public shelter had declined to accept the cats because they knew that they could not find homes for them. Those cats were included in the euthanasia numbers for which we are criticized.

6. Already because of fierce criticism of euthanasia numbers, public and private animal shelters are decreasing services offered. Some choose to no longer accept animals from owners, stop providing euthanasia services for owners whose animals are critically ill or injured when they cannot afford those services from a veterinarian, put animals on waiting lists to be accepted, or charge people to bring animals to them. Regulated quotas and euthanasia percentages would

result in the further decrease of services, leaving animals no place to go but on the streets, in field, in alleys, or on the sides of highways. I feel that result would be immediate.

7. What quota would be acceptable? Some say 50% and others say far less. Where will it end and how many animals will be abandoned by the very shelters built to protect them and offer them a second chance? Sometimes, that means protection from further suffering.

As an additional thought, I was concerned with the bill that resulted in these regulations because it was openly known that the bill targeted one private non-profit organization's shelter.

Although that organization may be controversial for some, its operations are legal. To recap, then, we had a law targeting one organization for its legal actions. The reason behind the bill was further testified to in the public hearing last week. One group, one legal action, one target.

Finally, I am grateful for the work of the VDACS staff members to propose regulations that are appropriate, compassionate, and reasonable. I am also grateful for your vote to further the process.

If you have any questions or concerns about anything I have said, I would be happy to address them.

Sincerely,

Paulette Dean
Director

Cc: Dr. Broaddus
Dr. Bissett