

To: Riverside County Board of Supervisors
From: Ty Peabody – Vice Chairman Coachella Valley Animal Services
Date: August 27, 2024

I appear before you to hopefully put in perspective issues facing DAS and specifically the Coachella Valley Shelter (CVAS). I have been on the commission as an Indian Wells representative for over eight years and was chairman for seven years.

Before blame is put on anyone at DAS, there needs to be a clear understanding of what has happened since COVID and up to today. The first question that needs to be understood are what are the root causes of the issues facing CVAS. The real problem is people:

- Hoarding animals, including dogs and cats
- A lack of consistent spade and neutering
- Animal abuse
- The public returning animals to CVAS because they cannot afford them or just plain don't want them anymore

Just in the last month there have been three serious hoarding issues:

- Thermal over 40 dogs that died and approximately 20 were saved.
- Sky Valley – over 50 dogs, most in good condition, but the shelter had to take them in.
- Riverside County – horses rescued, malnourished, and many dogs also rescued.

Just these issues mean over close to 100 animals had to be rescued and placed in the shelters. What did these hoarding issues cause? First overcrowding in the shelters through no fault of DAS and a need for immediate fostering, adoption, and flights to other states. I have personally witnessed healthy dogs returned to CVAS by owners that cannot afford them anymore or just plain don't want them anymore. Some even want CVAS to euthanize them for unexplainable reasons.

None of this is the fault of DAS, they just deal with the results of abuse, neglect, and irresponsibility.

Filing a lawsuit against DAS is not a solution to the problem. All it does is make the lawyers richer without coming up with solutions.

What needs to be done to help:

- Educate people regarding proper treatment of animals
- Expand foster program
- Increase microchip program

Ty Peabody

- Expand spade and neuter
- Coordinate efforts by all groups helping to foster or adopt animals
- Raise money through a separate fund to help cover costs
- Increasing staff at CVAS in order to make the process of adoption completed in a more timely manner (presently too slow through no fault of CVAS) – staffing issue
- Expand CVAS facility when funding is available on vacant property next to existing facility
- Hire a coordinator to focus on working with individuals or particularly organizations (like Loving All Animals) whose primary effort is to adopt animals out or place animals in other cities or states for adoption
- Expand veterinary services

Attacking Erin Gettis or any of her staff is unnecessary and unwarranted. If anyone of the people who are complaining took the time to understand what she has accomplished since assuming the position, maybe they would work with her on solving the issues versus criticizing her. There is no one at DAS that wants to euthanize animals. Everyone I have met at DAS and CVAS loves animals. Sometimes their job is overwhelming with sadness and frustration. CVAS didn't create the problem, certain members of the public did and do. Look at what has been accomplished in the last two years and a lot more than anyone knows.

Every city and county in California are facing budget issues. To solve the increasing issues at CVAS, which results in unfortunately euthanizing animals for various reasons, the county needs to determine what they can afford to do. In my opinion, the first projects where the county can help would be:

- Increase funds to provide increased spade and neutering
- Increase staff at CVAS to expedite adoptions
- Hire a coordinator to facilitate adoption groups like Loving All Animals to foster out or adopt animals
- Have full-time veterinary services available at CVAS
- When economically feasible, enlarge facility to accommodate more animals which will allow CVAS to increase the time allotted to a adopt out animals

I hope everyone here is looking for solutions, not just looking to criticize. To lessen the death rate of animals, it has to be a team effort that is clearly coordinated. Criticizing Erin accomplishes nothing. She didn't create the problem. Instead of criticizing her, help her accomplish what we all want – a reduction in euthanizations.

Animals being euthanized as shelters see overcrowding

Sam Morgan

Palm Springs Desert Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK

Animals are being euthanized as shelters struggle to cope with a sharp increase in animal intake that started toward the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coachella Valley, with its seasonal population and long stretch of warm months where animals can breed, has not been spared.

Shelters have run out of space, and yet each day they report more animals are abandoned than they can accommodate.

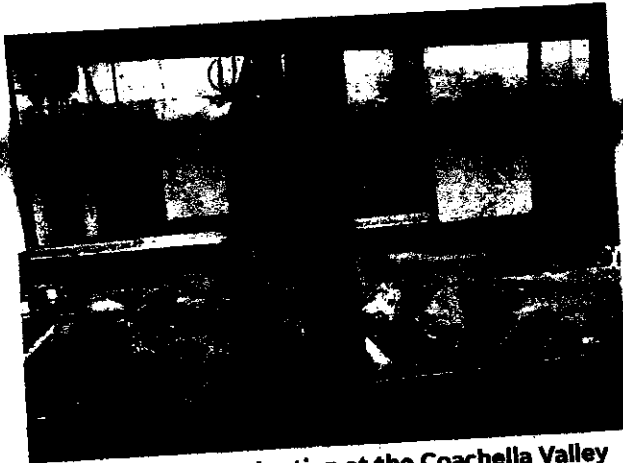
And in shelters run by Riverside County, high euthanasia rates have accompanied the influx. From January of May of this year 56% of all cats and 79% of dogs experienced "live outcomes," a term that includes adoption, a return to owner or a transfer to another facility. That means nearly half of cats and about one of every five dogs died.

In the Coachella Valley, the county's rate of live outcomes is better. At the county-run Coachella Valley Animal Campus, 85% of dogs and 87% of cats saw live releases from January through July of this year.

That shelter, however, houses only a portion of the county's overall animal population, with an average population of 156 dogs and 24 cats compared to the county's average totals of 1,052 dogs and 278 cats.

On Wednesday, four Coachella Valley residents announced they had filed a lawsuit against the Riverside County Animal Services Department asking a judge to order the removal of its director, Erin Gettis, along with the enactment of more measures to prevent euthanasia. The lawsuit alleges the county is in violation of a

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Older dogs await adoption at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms.



A 5-year-old German shepherd is excited as she gets adopted on Aug. 19, at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms.



A 2-year-old female Alaskan Husky awaits adoption at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms on Aug. 19.



A male Siberian Husky mix, seen on Aug. 19, who has been awaiting adoption at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms since July 5.

Shelters

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state law that prohibits euthanasia if an animal could be adopted into a suitable home.

The county says its use of euthanasia is due to the high volume of animals entering the shelter each day, a trend experienced by many other facilities. A county representative said the county had not yet received the lawsuit, but would review it to determine next steps.

The county is not the only animal care provider undergoing problems with overcrowding.

"It's gotten really bad this year," said

Lori Weiner, founder of California Paws Rescue, a Palm Springs-based animal rescue that focuses exclusively on English bull terriers. "As soon as we pull four dogs out, there's another five dogs that pop up. We just can't keep up with them. It's very hard."

Despite her limited focus, Weiner said she has had to close her rescue's doors to new intakes because her organization cannot handle the demand. With around 60 to 70 dogs under their care, she is at her limit.

"We went to that breed because all of a sudden they are ending up in the shelters right and left," she said. "They are one of the first to be euthanized in the shelter. We try to save as many as we can."



Dogs await adoption at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand P

It's not just English bull terriers that are struggling. Large dogs of all breeds are making their way to local shelters. Huskies, which rose in popularity due to the HBO show "Game of Thrones," are especially prominent, along with German shepherds and pit bulls. The number of kittens has also increased in local shelters, straining both pets and workers.

A lack of spay and neuter programs was cited by multiple shelter operators as one reason for the high numbers. Cats, which can have up to three litters of possibly a dozen or more kittens per year, are especially prone to population increases in the absence of spay and neuter programs.

Part of the problem lies with the higher cost of veterinary care, along with the difficulty in securing appointments. Experts have pointed to a general shortage of veterinarians across the country for the increased costs. Part of the shortage has been attributed to the high cost of a veterinary degree compared with the earning potential.

"People don't have access to affordable veterinary care. They can't get an appointment for spay and neuter," said John Welsh, spokesperson for the Riverside County Department of Animal Services, which oversees the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms and other sites. "People just gobble up our appointments quickly when we offer them. And I'm talking about county wide."

County leaders say they are working to address the issue. Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez has initiated several policies to ultimately lower the dog and cat population. In June, he earmarked \$30,000 to fund mobile animal service clinics in the Fourth District, which includes the Coachella Valley and the far eastern portion of the county.

The county has also not renewed a policy where local shelters accepted 5,000 dogs and cats from San Bernardino County, which contributed to overcrowding.

"With more approved funding from Supervisor Perez's discretionary funds for spay and neuter and pet care clinics, and more partnerships that have formed, we are looking forward towards a plan of action involving the county, cities and partners, to create a larger impact on this issue," Darin Schemmer, a spokesperson for Perez, said in an email to The Desert Sun.

Still, the overcrowding at local shelters causes the animals housed inside to struggle.

"Overcrowding of animals is going to decrease their adoptability because they are going to have more kennel stress," said Tom Snyder, CEO of Animal Samaritans, a private no-kill shelter and veterinary clinic located in Thousand Palms and Indio. "They are going to have more fear. They are going to be less friendly, less open. They are going to be more timid, more fearful. They are in an environment where there's too many and it's too stressful for them."

Overcrowding can also prove fatal. The county has been forced to euthanize elevated numbers of animals since the influx began.

Since the beginning of the year, the county has euthanized 5,474 animals, although 4,039 were either deemed untreatable or were euthanized at the request of the owner.

County statistics indicate 431 animals have died in custody for reasons besides euthanasia, such as illness. That already exceeds the 2023 figure by 46.

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