



Pet Assistance Foundation

A compassionate presence in the community since 1955

Dear Long Beach City Councilmember:

There is a trend among shelters to provide heightened service to animals in their care, and increased dedication to finding live outcomes for them. While this may have benefits to the animals it serves, **it requires limiting shelter population to a level determined by shelter resources, rather than by the actual number of unwanted animals present and suffering in the community.**

Short of building ever larger facilities and endlessly increasing staff, **there are three ways to reach and maintain a desired capacity level when community need exceeds it:**

1. Limit the number of animals entering the shelter.
2. Increase the number of animals exiting the shelter.
3. Reduce the need for shelter space by proactively addressing the cause of the problem out in the community, where it originates.

Item one is accomplished by **creating stricter requirements for admission, or by placing obstacles in the way.** If the purpose of a shelter is to serve their community, limiting intake can be problematic. LBAC is using a form of limited admissions called managed admissions, where residents must make appointments for most services, such as adoption, relinquishing a pet, or turning in a stray animal. The appointment system allows the shelter to better allocate staff time, and provide a richer experience to those clients who have the flexibility to access it, however many people who have found a stray or are being evicted and must surrender a pet do not have the luxury of waiting for an appointment, and may make a rash decision, such as giving their pet to someone who doesn't really want it or is not in a position to keep it, or they may simply release it in a park. We also get frequent calls from distressed residents reporting that when they have called the shelter about abandoned kittens in hazardous situations, they were instructed to just leave them where they found them.

Some of this restricted access is due to COVID, but it's becoming clear that the shelters plan to continue these practices even after the pandemic. Of course, it's easier to run a facility and care for the animals when there are far fewer of them, but what about the increasing numbers of distressed and homeless animals that are turned away?

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The second way to keep numbers down is to **have more animals exit the shelter**, once they have arrived. Proactive reunification efforts, creative adoption approaches and transferring pets to responsible rescue groups are positive means to this end. Unfortunately, they are rarely enough, and more desperate approaches come into play, with dire consequences for the animals. These include **dropping adoption standards, inadequate vetting of rescue partners, and, the worst because of how many it affects, Return to Field programs.**

You may be aware of the original concept of Trap Neuter Release (TNR), where feral cats, deemed unsuitable to be house pets, are trapped, altered, put back where they were found, then looked after by one or more caregivers. Caregivers provide food and water, arrange for vet care when needed, and watch for newcomers who may not yet be altered. Making sure all cats are unable to breed is a priority, and the goal is that eventually, through attrition, **no cats will have to live this desperate lifestyle.** Done properly, TNR can be a humane, if less than ideal, solution to the persistent problem of unowned cats.

Return to Field (RTF) is not TNR. It differs in important ways. Cats that are brought to a shelter—whether feral or friendly, young or old, lost or a notorious neighborhood nuisance—are vet-checked, neutered, ear-clipped and released right back wherever they were found. **RTF does not require a caregiver, or even assurance that the location is safe or the cats are welcome, and makes no effort to find and fix other cats in the area.** The shelter defends the practice, saying that friendly cats often belong to people who wouldn't bother to look for them in the shelter. If a cat is not underweight when it arrives, they assume it must know where to find food. If it appears relatively healthy, it must be doing okay. Yet we have substantial documentation of local, municipal shelters releasing cats into the communities. These are cats and even young kittens that are sick, have injuries, are malnourished or have become victims of frightful cruelty perpetrated by people who want them gone.

The practice of having a city policy of abandoning animals sets a terrible example for the public. It perpetuates the myth that cats can take care of themselves, reinforces their status as second class and perpetuates suffering.

The **third way** to reach ideal shelter capacity, or even less, is **to be proactive: focus on the actual problem rather than the symptoms.** Shelters get overcrowded because of indiscriminate breeding, and uninformed choices people make when acquiring pets. **Long Beach has excellent legislation** to curb breeding. **The focus must now be on enforcement; raising awareness of the need to spay and neuter pets and providing affordable venues to that end; and humane education.** Spay

and neuter works. It is the only reason we've gotten to the point where we can entertain the idea of "saving them all." Humane education, in addition to improving the lives of both pets and people, increases understanding of what is involved in owning a pet, and helps prepare people to make better choices and stronger commitments to them.

For example, proponents of RTF say that many friendly cats that come in as strays actually have homes, but their owners would not know to look for them in the shelter. So, their cat winds up at a shelter, we provide a free spay or neuter, cut off a piece of its ear, and turn it loose, betting it will find its way home. Since we're paying for the surgery anyway, wouldn't it be better to reach out to the public about shelter services, offer them a free spay or neuter, and let their cat keep its ear intact? Better yet, why not launch a public information campaign about why most cats should be kept indoors?

We hope that you will carefully consider this information. **Long Beach**, with its progressive legislation, compassionate citizenry, and strong volunteerism, **is in a unique position to become a national leader in humane sheltering**. But to truly deserve that distinction, we must first realize that the live release rate alone does not give a true picture of our humanity. **Achieving "no kill" status by sanctioning abandonment, limiting service to the community, and counseling the public to leave abandoned animals to struggle for survival is not admirable**. This boutique shelter approach may work well for the animals it agrees to take on, but overall, *it fails to address the needs of our community as a whole, ignores suffering, and amounts to a reduction in service to your constituents*.

Yours in compassion,

Wendy Aragon

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