



Office of the Administrator

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To: The Honorable Senator Paul Campbell and members of the Select Subcommittee
From: Greenville County and Greenville County Animal Care
Re: Animal Welfare Listening Sessions

As requested by you and the committee at the September 23rd listening session in Greenville, Greenville County respectfully submits, in requested bullet point form, facts and comments that clarify the County's role in enriching the lives of companion animals and promoting responsible pet guardianship through services designed to reduce pet overpopulation and improve pet reclamation, retention, and rehoming efforts.

We appreciate that the listening sessions are a valuable tool for members of the Select Subcommittee and all stakeholders to gain a better perspective on the issues and challenges involved in animal welfare. At the hearing held in Greenville there were some speakers who offered comments about the role of Greenville County Animal Care that in some cases were misinformed and other comments included hearsay. We did not think time permitted a complete response to each of these comments so this document seeks to clarify the role of the County with regard to those comments.

-Greenville County Animal Care is already regulated by the state. South Carolina Code of Laws Title 40-69-70 (11) authorizes the South Carolina Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (SCBVME) to establish and enforce standards for ALL facilities in which veterinary medicine is practiced. Therefore, SCBVME and South Carolina Labor Licensing and Regulation (SCLLR) do have authority – without additional legislation—to inspect and regulate animal shelters and other non-profit agencies that provide veterinary services. Also, in an official release, the SCBVME stated: *“From an administrative and regulatory standpoint, this position is consistent with current statues and regulations; and it requires no legislative action.”* A copy of this statement is available at <http://www.llr.state.sc.us/POL/Veterinary/pdf/SCBVME%20Statement%20on%20Inspections%20of%20Veterinary%20Services%20and%20Facilities%20in%20Connection%20with%20Animal%20Shelters.pdf>

-Pet overpopulation, poverty, and public health are major issues in our state. These issues are interrelated and provide great challenges to the government agency that is

ultimately responsible for providing services. Private veterinarians have a vital and irreplaceable role in animal care but they are not-obligated to address these very public issues; the County is. Greenville County Animal Care provides, on average, 10,000 spay/neuter surgeries per year. If we did not provide those services then the 35 private veterinary clinics in our area would each have to perform 285 additional surgeries per year in order to meet this need. They would also have to do this at a price point that pet owners can afford. If not, then many of these pets would go without these services and thus perpetuate the cycle that created the overpopulation. More and more animals would be surrendered placing tremendous burdens on government-funded shelters and euthanasia rates would increase. The number of pet owners would decline. Ironically, this would lessen the available population of pet owners that would need the services of private veterinary clinics. Why would veterinarians want to support something that lessened demand for their services?

-Public Health. Veterinarians have correctly stated that: “Strays are hazardous and carry disease.” Yet, it is the County and not private care veterinarians that are responsible for addressing this public health issue. We must continue to seek to improve the health of the animals *before* they become strays and become a public health threat. A County that works proactively within its community to provide preventative medical care that keeps pets homed and healthy should be supported – not over regulated. Because otherwise the alternative for pet owners who cannot afford care at private practice clinics is to surrender their pets to already overcrowded shelters or let them loose to run-at-large, creating public health and safety situations. Both of these options place tremendous burdens on governments, and most importantly negatively impact the lives of the companion animals.

We are concerned that burdensome and unnecessary regulations will raise costs and will not advance the shared goals expressed by all stakeholders and citizens engaged in this process.

-State tax revenue does not support Animal Care Services. Animal Care is a fee-supported entity. County services are low-cost, not free. The County also aggressively seeks and captures charitable donations and private grant funding. These fees, donations and grants support the adoption, wellness, and spay/neuter efforts of the facility. Local- and only local - tax dollars are budgeted for the Animal Control efforts of the County. This includes funding of equipment, materials, and housing for more than 20,000 animals that come to the facility each year, and staff. Unlike other organizations involved with these conversations about animal welfare, Greenville County Animal Care does not and cannot turn away any animal. We are ultimately responsible for all animals that need shelter.

Many veterinarians have asked for or referenced the term “level playing field”. Our mission and purpose is different than private veterinarians and we do not seek to compete with them. We respect the invaluable role they play in the community and the skilled services they provide to pet owners. However, it is important to point out that working in the private business sector, veterinarians have the option of which services they wish to provide, and which to refuse. The County does not have these options. We deal with each and every animal and do so 365 days a year.

-Animal Cruelty, puppy mills, and more should be the focus of any statewide legislation. As stated by many at the listening session, focusing on the special interest of private veterinarians is missing the real issue. There is nothing involving spay/neuter, wellness, and adoption that is broken and needs to be fixed. However, South Carolina cruelty laws are archaic and reflect poorly on our state. If more veterinarians actively work toward improved animal welfare alongside Greenville County Animal Care and thousands of other caring citizens and groups, that is truly an accomplishment we can all proudly say we worked together to achieve. Let's not undermine the common goals we all share in the animal care community by adopting policies that impede the outstanding services animal welfare groups provide.