

Animal Services Advisory Committee FY25 Budget Testimony

Good Evening Councilmembers. I am Kim Haden, representing the County's Animal Services Advisory Committee. I am speaking in support of the County Executive's Recommended FY 2025 operating budget for the Office of Animal Services (OAS). He is recommending the addition of three critically needed positions, including a Foster and Rescue Coordinator and Registered Veterinary Technician that will greatly enhance the life-saving mission of OAS.

The additional Foster and Rescue Coordinator role is a critical position for handling capacity issues at the shelter when they become overcrowded and will significantly contribute to the efficient and organized placement of animals into homes. An additional Foster and Rescue Coordinator ensures the animals' well-being and alleviates the burden on existing resources.

The inclusion of two Registered Veterinary Technicians will play a pivotal role in supporting medical procedures, including spay and neuter surgeries, allowing animals to leave the shelter in a shorter time frame. As professionals licensed by The State of Maryland, Registered Veterinary Technicians possess specific privileges under the law that can only be assigned to these positions and licensed Veterinarians. The additional Registered Vet Technicians will support the reduction of the common backlog of surgeries in the shelter.

Furthermore, we would like to highlight a recommendation that was central in the Maddie's Fund report in October 2023. This report emphasized the importance of preventative measures to keep animals out of the shelter, such as a robust spay and neuter initiative that reaches into the community, particularly communities that are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Therefore, we hope to see additional future support from the Council on community spay and neuter initiatives as well.

We urge you to consider and prioritize the allocation of resources necessary to fulfill these staffing requirements. By doing so, we can not only enhance the effectiveness of our county's animal services but also actively contribute to a healthier and more sustainable animal community. These requests align with the priorities set forth by the Office of Animal Services and recommendations provided in the Maddie's Million Pet Challenge consult, further reinforcing the urgency and necessity of these additions to our animal services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Animal Services Advisory Committee FY25 Budget Letter

Subject: Urgent Need for Additional Staff in the Office of Animal Services

Dear County Executive Elrich and Council President Friedson,

We are writing to you as the Animal Service Advisory Committee (ASAC) to bring your attention to a critical matter concerning the well-being of our community's animals. The Office of Animal Services (OAS) has identified a pressing need for a Foster and Rescue Coordinator and two Registered Veterinary Technicians to enhance their ability to care for animals in our county.

The additional Foster and Rescue Coordinator role is a critical position for handling capacity issues at the shelter when they become overcrowded and will significantly contribute to the efficient and organized placement of animals into homes. As you know, the OAS saw a significant increase in shelter population in FY2023, causing the shelter to reach critical capacity. When reaching these critical levels, the Foster and Rescue Coordinator takes on additional burden of moving animals out of the shelter both through transfer to other rescue groups and to temporary foster homes - a job too big for one person. An additional Foster and Rescue Coordinator ensures the animals' well-being and alleviates the burden on existing resources. Additionally, the Maddie's Million Pet Challenge consult included the recommendations that the OAS:

- open Wednesdays for adoption,
- create system to schedule Foster to Adopt and fosters for surgery at the time of release with a system of checks and balances,
- create formal Foster to Adopt program to avoid any increase in length of stay pending surgery,
- increase the number of pets placed in foster homes and streamline flow to live outcome (while still trying to recruit foster volunteer ambassadors), and
- welcome walk-in adoptions and reduce or discontinue appointments.

The additional Foster and Rescue Coordinator will support these recommendations.

The inclusion of two Registered Veterinary Technicians will play a pivotal role in supporting medical procedures, including spay and neuter surgeries, allowing animals to leave the shelter in a shorter time frame. As professionals licensed by The State of Maryland, Registered Veterinary Technicians possess specific privileges under the law that can only be assigned to these positions and licensed Veterinarians. These include anesthetic induction and monitoring, suturing of surgical incisions, accessing working stocks of Schedule II controlled drugs, performing basic medical examinations of injured or ill animals and providing medical support to animals under the direction of the Veterinarian. In addition to

supporting the common backlog of surgeries in the shelter, the Maddie's Million Pet Challenge consult also included the recommendation that the Office of Animal Services:

- use contract staff for weekly rabies clinic,
- ensure all parents of puppies/kittens surrendered have access to spay/neuter,
- create pathway for community cats to instead have spay/neuter surgery, rabies vaccination, ear tip and return to their original location the day after surgery,
- provide canine influenza vaccination on intake as soon as it is available,
- create system to schedule Foster to Adopt and fosters for surgery at the time of release with a system of checks and balances,
- reserve veterinarians for doctor-only tasks and reorganize surgery flow, and
- reclass the current veterinary assistant to a Registered Vet Technician.

The additional Registered Vet Technicians will support these recommendations.

Furthermore, we would like to highlight a recommendation that was central in the Maddie's Fund report. This report emphasized the importance of preventative measures to keep animals out of the shelter, such as a robust spay and neuter initiative that reaches into the community, particularly communities that are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The addition of the Registered Veterinary Technicians is a step in the right direction to support the smooth functioning of the existing backlogs within the shelter and contribute to operating a successful veterinary operation. However more needs to be done by the County to support spay/neuter services in the community if we are to ever gain control over the population of unwanted pets and provide long term relief to the MCASAC's overcrowding problem. Therefore, we hope to see additional future support from the Council on community spay and neuter initiatives as well.

We urge you to consider and prioritize the allocation of resources necessary to fulfill these staffing requirements. By doing so, we can not only enhance the effectiveness of our county's animal services but also actively contribute to a healthier and more sustainable animal community. These requests align with the priorities set forth by the Office of Animal Services and recommendations provided in the Maddie's Million Pet Challenge consult, further reinforcing the urgency and necessity of these additions to our animal services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Animal Services Advisory Committee

cc:

Honorable Sydney Katz, Chair, Public Safety Committee

Honorable Dawn Luedtke, Member, Public Safety Committee

Honorable Kristin Mink, Member, Public Safety Committee

Ms. Jennifer Bryant, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Ms. Fariba Kassiri, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer