

Animal Services Advisory Committee  
Testimony on FY27 Operating Budget  
April 7, 2026

My name is Vicki Thomas, and I am testifying on behalf of the County's Animal Services Advisory Committee which represents numerous animal welfare organizations and the public. Our responsibility is to advise the Council and County Executive on all matters related to animal services. I have also volunteered for over 4,500 hours at the county shelter.

The welfare of animals in Montgomery County is inseparable from the wellbeing of its residents. The Office of Animal Services (OAS) stands at the center of this connection, serving both as a guardian of animal welfare and a pillar of public health and safety.

We recognize the enormous challenges you face with the budget this year, but the direct services OAS provides are essential, not optional, and are literally a matter of life and death.

The current economic and political disruptions are forcing families into heartbreaking decisions, and the impact is showing up at our shelter doors. Surrendered animals are rising. Cases of neglect and cruelty are increasing. Abandonment is becoming more common.

The shelter is operating beyond capacity while still striving to maintain high standards of care and a live release rate of 90%. These goals are now at risk—not because of a lack of commitment or compassion, but because of a lack of resources.

Imagine your dog being confined in a small kennel for 23 and ½ hours a day, or your cat in a small steel cage with minimum interaction. This is not ethical or humane and can lead to severe medical and behavioral issues.

Without immediate staffing support, the County may be forced into decisions no one wants, including euthanasia.

Therefore we request funding for five additional animal care attendants which are the minimum necessary to safely and humanely manage the current and predicted volume of animals in our care, and another foster/rescue coordinator so that pets can leave our shelter alive.

Continued investment in prevention is also critical. The Healthy Pets, Happy Homes initiative directly reduces shelter intake by helping families access pet food and veterinary care before a crisis occurs. We recommend maintaining \$30,000 for the community pet food pantry and \$125,000 for low-cost spay and neuter.

These programs are not only compassionate—they are cost-effective. It costs about \$1,600 to care for each animal in the shelter, more than the cost of preventing that intake in the first place.

This is a moment to decide what kind of county we want to be: one that ignores an impending crisis, or one that works to prevent it.

OAS is not merely an animal shelter—it is a cornerstone of the county's civic and moral responsibility. It provides direct support to both community residents and the county's animals and deals with life and death situations daily.

Therefore we urge you to fund the necessary staffing, sustain prevention programs, and ensure OAS has the resources needed to protect our community, so that our county remains a safe, humane, and forward-thinking place for all who call it home.