




Memorandum



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To: Honorable Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez
Honorable Chairman Esteban L. Bovo, Jr.
and Members, Board of County Commissioners, Miami-Dade County

From: Mary T. Cagle, Inspector General 

Date: June 26, 2017

Subject: OIG Final Report, Review of ASD's Shelter Operations; Ref. IG14-39

Attached please find the above-captioned final report issued by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). This review was originally predicated on complaints received by the OIG alleging, among other things, that the Miami-Dade Animal Services Department (ASD) falsified records and mistreated animals. Our investigation into these specific complaints morphed into a broader review of ASD's practices and procedures in operating the shelter. The resulting report contains 18 recommendations covering several aspects of shelter operations and other departmental procedures. The OIG's review did not find intentional falsification of records or mistreatment of animals.

This report, as a draft, was provided to Mr. Alex Munoz, ASD Director, for his review and the opportunity to provide a written response. ASD's response is attached as Appendix A. ASD agreed to implement 15 of the 18 recommendations, and has provided explanations as to why it believes implementation of the other four recommendations are not necessary. Supplemental materials were also provided by ASD after it submitted its initial response, and these are included in Appendix B.

Given that the implementation of some recommendations are prospective, and in accordance with Section 2-1076(d)(2) of the Code of Miami-Dade County, the OIG requests that ASD provide a status report in 90 days on the implementation of those recommendations. We would appreciate receiving the report on or before Friday, September 22, 2017. Last, please be advised that this final report has been redacted to comply with the confidentiality requirements of security system information found in §§281.301 and 119.071(3)(a), Fla. Statutes.

For your reading convenience, the Executive Summary is reprinted and attached to this transmittal.

Attachment

cc: Alina Hudak, Deputy Mayor
Alex Munoz, Director, Animal Services Department
Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit and Management Services Department
Neil T. Singh, Interim Commission Auditor

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OIG Review of ASD's Shelter Operations

Stray, lost, and abandoned pets present a challenge to communities across the country. The Miami-Dade County Animal Services Department (ASD) is the agency dedicated to dealing with the demands of sheltering and caring for the welfare of Miami-Dade County's animals.¹ ASD's stated goal is to reunite lost pets with their owners, find life-long homes for as many animals as possible, and provide proper care during their stay. Each year in Miami-Dade County approximately 28,000 to 35,000 animals enter the County's animal shelter.

The Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has received many complaints concerning ASD and its management and care of the animals at the shelter. The complainants ranged from former ASD employees and volunteers to individual pet owners and animal rights advocates. The allegations ranged from animal abuse and corrupt management to incompetence and inefficiency. As a result of the varied allegations, the OIG conducted a review of ASD and its shelter operations. The OIG's review spanned the range of shelter operations related to the intake, care and release of animals, recordkeeping, procedures, and security of the facility. During the course of the review, additional complaints were received by the OIG. The scope and breadth of the review was adjusted numerous times in order to ensure that the OIG examined as many, as possible, of the concerns brought to our attention. The task of sheltering and caring for the County's stray, lost, and abandoned animals is complex. ASD must balance the needs and welfare of the animals in its care against the limitations of space and funding. The sheer volume of animals handled by ASD on a yearly basis is staggering. ASD has made some great strides in recent years increasing positive outcomes, such as adoptions, while reducing the number of negative outcomes, such as euthanasia, for the animals in its care. These efforts have been implemented as part of ASD's move towards becoming a "No-Kill" shelter, which is defined as a shelter having a 90 percent rate, or better, of saved animals.²

Yet, in spite of ASD's successes, the OIG received complaints from individuals and animal advocates. Many of the complainants expressed their belief that the shelter's need to report the number of saved animals results in manipulation or falsification of records in order to meet the No-Kill goal. The OIG also received complaints alleging intentional mistreatment of animals. The OIG's review focused on determining the validity of the complaints regarding falsification of records and the complainants' concerns about the security and welfare of the animals. The OIG also assessed ASD's practices and procedures in operating the shelter.

¹ ASD mainly provides services to dogs and cats. Although ASD also takes in other species, ASD will find appropriate shelters or agencies to handle the care of those animals. For purposes of this report any references to ASD's care of "animals" will denote the care of dogs and cats.

² The goal rate was developed by specific No-Kill movement programs throughout the U.S. that advocate for alternatives to animal shelter euthanasia.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OIG Review of ASD's Shelter Operations

The OIG's review did not find any intentional mistreatment of animals. Neither were the allegations regarding intentional falsification of records to enhance the shelter's reported rate of animals saved substantiated.

This report examines eight specific areas based on the allegations received. In conjunction with investigating specific complaints, the report details observations and findings made by the OIG during the course of the review. The specific areas reviewed are:

- A. Animal Security & Safety
- B. Animal Welfare
- C. Save Rate
- D. Chameleon Record Keeping³
- E. Records Reconciliation
- F. Transfers to Rescue Organizations
- G. Security of Facilities & Controlled Substances
- H. ASD Staffing

Specific case examples are used throughout the report to discuss the issues found and the allegations reviewed. At the conclusion of each section, the OIG provides specific recommendations to address the OIG observations with the objective of improving the shelter's operations.

In Section A, the OIG evaluated the security and safety of animals at the kennel based on allegations that animals escape or are missing and that ASD staff are intentionally arranging animal fights. The OIG's review found incidents of escaped and missing animals to be low, and despite allegations to the contrary, the OIG found no evidence that ASD staff intentionally arranged animal fights. Although our primary objectives were the allegations, the OIG's review looked closely at the procedures in place to ensure the security and safety of the animals. Based on those observations, the OIG found some areas that could be improved. For example, the OIG found no specific written policy in place detailing the process of performing the daily physical inventory of the animals. The OIG also found staff lapses in following certain kennel procedures, and a lack of review, or investigation, of incidents involving animal fights resulting in serious injuries.

Also reviewed, as noted in Section B of the report, was ASD's provision of adequate exercise, enrichment, medical treatment and a safe environment for the shelter's animals. No evidence was found regarding allegations of lack of treatment or improper medical treatment, nor of improper mixtures or administration of drugs. However, ASD's system of tracking and management of exercise for the animals at the shelter was found to be inadequately managed and lacking consistency. The OIG is aware that ASD is taking steps to enhance the enrichment and exercise provided to animals at its

³ Chameleon is ASD's internal electronic animal case management system.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OIG Review of ASD's Shelter Operations

new Doral facility. These steps along with the OIG's recommendations, if implemented, will greatly enhance the welfare of the sheltered animals.

Section C of the report sets forth the OIG's review of allegations that ASD manipulates records in order to show a favorable Save Rate. The OIG did not find, as suggested by the allegations, that ASD intentionally manipulated information in order to positively affect the Save Rate. Nor was it found that employees were inappropriately rewarded and encouraged to promote incorrect data and falsify statistics, nor that ASD has a quota system designed to enhance the Save Rate. While the OIG did not find a problem with the Save Rate, we are making the recommendation that ASD report the raw numbers and disclose any figures excluded in its calculation of the Save Rate.

To review the Save Rate calculations it was necessary to review ASD's record keeping and record gathering system, Chameleon. ASD's reconciliation of records was also examined. The recommendations that follow these two sections in the report (see Sections D and E) are geared to making changes that allow for a uniform system to record and correct errors. Although the total number of errors reviewed by the OIG was nominal and did not affect the Save Rate percentage reported, such errors should be avoided and corrected. More importantly, the system should have a uniform methodology for correcting errors. The OIG provided recommendations to ensure that records are reconciled to ensure that the data is accurate and that errors can be corrected or explained.

Next, in Section F, the OIG reviewed ASD's tracking of animals transferred to rescue organizations. The OIG found that ASD has not been consistently tracking the disposition of animals transferred to rescue organizations. Although ASD has recently re-written the agreements with rescue organizations, with a stated goal of improved monitoring, the OIG believes the new method is inadequate, and we provide a recommendation to improve ASD's oversight of the rescue organizations.

Regarding the physical security of the facilities and the controlled substances, Section G of the report, the OIG found some issues in the Medley and Doral facilities. The recommendations that follow this section are meant to enhance security. The last section of the report, Section H, addresses staffing issues based on the independent observations of OIG investigators during the review. In reviewing staffing issues, the OIG is concerned with the ability of ASD to operate two facilities with limited staff resources, and ensure the safety, care, and attention required to be given to sheltered animals.

Prior to the presentation of the issues summarized above, a background section sets forth an overview of ASD. A brief history of ASD's establishment, its mission, and recent accomplishments; and an overview of facilities, funding, and operating sections is provided for informational purposes. A brief description of the shelter's intake and tracking system is also discussed in order to put in context much of the information in this report.