



Date: May 28, 2019

To: Joint Subcommittee On Natural Resources
Senator Kathleen Taylor, Co-Chair
Representative Jeff Reardon, Co-Chair

From: Sharon Harmon
President and CEO, Oregon Humane Society

Re: Senate Bill 883

Established in 1868, the Oregon Humane Society is the state’s largest and oldest animal welfare organization with over 50,000 supporters statewide. We are not affiliated with any local or national organization. **We are here today to ask you to support SB 883.**

In the last decade there has been a tremendous increase in the underground pet railroad. There are thousands of animals moving through these nontraditional groups in Oregon. The public never gets to visit and without public funding there is no accountability—these rescues fly under the radar in every sense. For some it is a profit driven practice, dogs go for upwards of \$400 and in many cases well-funded groups in other states pay for the transport to Oregon, the individuals running these rescues get a large pay off for little expense. It is a cash business; the transaction mirrors that of the drug trade with purchasers meeting dealers in parking lots or the mall. There is a place for specialty rescues that do amazing things and save lives that traditional shelters cannot. Some of those groups spend thousands of dollars on each dog and provide superior care, but more and more “rescues” eventually get off track, can’t pay the bills, can’t come to terms with the fact that it is impossible to save every at risk animal. When these underground rescues start to struggle with those realities is when they often turn to denial and secrecy. The phenomenon of animal rescue turned rescue hoarder is not too far down the continuum for many of these groups.

The drive to be “no kill” and the nearly fanatical adherence to the strictest interpretation of the phrase leads some people to believe any life is better than death, even if that means a slow and painful “natural” death through starvation, neglect, untreated injuries and disease. That is what we saw in 2013 when OHS assisted Marion Co. Sheriff’s Office with the execution of a warrant at a warehouse leased by Willamette Animal Rescue. OHS took in over 100 sick and starving dogs that night and the citizens of Oregon were outraged that an animal rescue could hide and neglect so many dogs for as long as they did. In response to this case, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 6 which included a statewide animal rescue licensing requirement to be implemented at the county level (ORS 609.415/420).



It has been six years since Senate Bill 6 passed and, from what we can determine, only four counties have taken the necessary steps to implement the licensing plan for animal rescues. Many counties do not have the resources to implement and enforce the requirements of ORS 609.415 and instead do nothing to regulate or oversee the business of animal rescue in their areas.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture, through the State Veterinarian, is the appropriate agency to take on this responsibility. Using an agency with statewide jurisdiction to implement a licensing scheme for animal rescue entities would result in more uniform standards and processes and consistency in enforcement.

This model has been tested and found to be necessary and successful in Colorado. Just this past March the Colorado Department of Agriculture revoked the license of an animal rescue that had contracted with Pueblo City. An inspection by the State found multiple animals deceased, animals kept in small kennels, improper sanitation, and healthy animals housed with sick animals; essentially this was institutionalized hoarding of animals. The oversight by the Department of Agriculture was the necessary tool to intervene on behalf of the animals and end the suffering immediately by revoking their license.

Oregon needs to make this change to uncover any existing wrong-doing and prevent “bad actor” animal rescue entities that exploit the vulnerable population the rest are trying to save.

We encourage you to vote ‘yes’ on SB 883.

Sincerely,

Sharon Harmon
President and CEO, Oregon Humane Society
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<https://www.fox21news.com/news/local/community-animal-services-of-pueblo-gives-up-license/1882122854>

PUEBLO, Colo. - Wednesday morning, Community Animal Services of Pueblo voluntarily gave up its license to operate an animal shelter for the city and county of Pueblo following an investigation by the Colorado Department of Agriculture that failed the shelter three separate times at the beginning of March.

"Relinquishing our license is the fastest way for us to get care for the animals," Kim Alfonso, the acting board president for PAWS for Life Animal Shelter, said in a statement.

Tuesday, city councilors and county commissioners heard from the board members, including Alfonso and Ruth McDonald, to ask them about the investigation's findings. Many of the lawmakers expressed their desire to see the operators, PAWS, relinquish their license.

Late last year, councilor and commissioners approved PAWS to take over operations of the shelter when they promised a lower budget and the city created a no-kill shelter ordinance.

The inspector with the Department of Agriculture cited multiple violations that were not fixed by the time of the next investigation.

He noted multiple animal deaths, animals in kennels smaller than what the state allows, cats kept without proper or any litter box at all, healthy animals kept with sick ones, improper sanitation, and improper quarantine, among a plethora of other accusations.

"Each time the board felt one problem was addressed as it relates to the care of the animals, another cropped up," Alfonso said in a statement.

Animals that were in the facility are now in the process of being transported elsewhere. As of 7 p.m. Wednesday evening, other shelters from around the state were on site in an effort to help move them.

"Our top concern is the ongoing health and safety of all the animals in the shelter and to make sure they are transferred to facilities that can address any health issues and help find new homes for the animals," Department of Agriculture spokesman Ben Walther said in a statement.

Walther said Community Animal Services of Pueblo cannot adopt out or take in any more animals, including strays.

Dozens of people showed up to the animal shelter Wednesday morning and into the afternoon in hopes of adopting one of the animals. Many of them said they were drawn to the shelter by a Facebook post saying there were \$25 adoption fees for animals.

Early in the afternoon, the shelter locked its doors and stopped adoptions.



The Department of Agriculture has instructed Community Animal Services of Pueblo to transfer all animals to Pet Animals Care Facilities Act-licensed facilities.

"It's such a shock," Dr. Kent Hill said. "At one point, we really did feel like Pueblo was a standard for the United States, for other cities in Colorado for how they could have a more compassionate shelter care."

Hill is a chiropractor whose office is right next to the shelter. He said he volunteers his time to help walk the dogs when he can.

Hill is also one of the driving forces behind the ordinance to ban anything but no-kill shelters in Pueblo.

Nearly two years ago to the day, he adopted a dog from the facility, but it wasn't easy.

"I begged and pleaded with the manager, please let me adopt this dog," Hill said.

The dog was marked as aggressive and was going to be put down. Hill took it to another shelter for evaluation and was eventually able to adopt it.

"That's what really started this whole thing," Hill said. "Prior to that, people didn't know three to four-month-old puppies were being euthanized in the Pueblo tax-funded animal shelter."

Hill said he doesn't regret the ordinance and what has happened at the facility since.

Animals are being transported to the following shelters, according to a person with the shelter:

- Dumb Friends League in Denver
- Cooper's Companions in Boone
- Happy Cats Haven in Colorado Springs
- ARF Animal Rescue Force in Teller County
- Steel City Alley Cats Coalition in Pueblo
- Misfits in Pueblo

The state said strays will also be housed at the original PAWS facility.