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December 1, 2016

Re: Pet Care and Humane Treatment Study Committee

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

My name is Aldwin Roman, I am the Director of Anti-Cruelty and Outreach at Charleston Animal Society in North Charleston. I live on Johns Island in Charleston. I am also one of only two certified animal cruelty investigators in the state of South Carolina.

I have several issues I would like to bring up today and all of them can be framed by a recent experience I had on a cruelty case. About a month after Hurricane Matthew, a North Charleston Police Officer came into the shelter wanting to speak to someone. When on patrol, he was walking the grounds around an abandoned building that was for sale. He saw a turtle in a tank through the front door and wondered if there was someone living there. When he knocked on the front door he heard a dog barking. There was no power, no windows, no light, no running water, and no air flow in the building. The property was right on the city/county line so there was debate about who had jurisdiction. I ended going back to the property with the officer. It turns out there were 6 dogs and a cat in the building. The cages were relatively clean but without any running water in the building I wondered how they were being cleaned. I found the cat in a back room in a dog crate. Between the feces filled litter box and the empty food and water dish there was nowhere for the cat to lie down. None of the conditions were egregious but the whole situation felt off putting and in my opinion was well below minimum standards. The responding officer's supervisor eventually came out but was immediately dismissive that there was a problem. On face value he didn't see any issue here. After I walked him through and pointed out my concerns he started to understand. Then another problem, the Sgt. wasn't sure what to do next. He said they don't handle animal calls ever so he didn't know what the next step was. I told the officer that in my professional opinion if you can't locate an owner and relocate these animals soon then they should be seized. He was eventually able to get in touch with the owner of the property. The story she told was that all the animals had been put over the fence during Hurricane Matthew. And that she knew that by law she had to hold the animals for 30 days. It was about 30 days since the evacuation and she had been just meaning to call the shelter to have the animals picked up. The story was not believable and just didn't make sense but she had not broken any laws, except maybe some code violations for trash



around the building. It turns out one of the dogs there was being boarded there by a paying customer. This one detail allowed the police to cite the owner for operating a business without a license but there were no other charges.

I think this story highlights a number of issues our state has with animal care. There are no regulations or basic standards for boarding facilities. Standards for air quality, light, food and water quality, disease control, cleaning and adequate supervision do not exist. And so a place like what I described above violates no laws despite there being clearly substandard care. Last year, when a dog died from overheating after being trapped under a metal play pool for hours at a boarding facility, there was only a civil case despite clear negligence on the part of the business. My concern is not only for boarding facilities but for any organization or business that provides care for animals. Whether it is a veterinary clinic, shelter, rescue, or boarding kennel, there need to be minimum standards of care.

Luckily there were only 7 animals in this particular place. But just earlier this year I assisted in the seizure of over 600 animals from a defunct rescue just over the border in North Carolina. And just this past December, right after Christmas, we took in 110 animals from a former rescue. The problems are bubbling just under the surface. And it's not just animal regulations that are lacking. Our animal cruelty laws as written as not effective. Our catch all statute lacks the specificity to be effective at addressing the wide variety of animal abuse crimes. We need structured tiered animal abuse laws that have different statutes for neglect, intentional abuse, and also hoarding, with punishments that fit each crime. I believe Kurt Taylor, also with the Charleston Animal Society, submitted a set of model animal protection laws. This document contains a lot of good content that should be considered in revising our current animal cruelty laws. Things like first and second degree neglect separate from first and second degree intentional abuse, and having a statute for leaving dogs in cars are all important changes. And we need laws to address hoarding problems. In many hoarding cases there is tremendous animal suffering but not always a clear intent to harm the animals involved. Hoarding is recognized as a mental problem and if left unaddressed it will be a recurring problem. Some offenses warrant a felony charge but the current mandatory jail time will not deter someone who is a hoarder. Psychiatric treatment is necessary to prevent reoccurrence. Building in mandatory psychiatric evaluation and treatment for certain abusers would go a long way to give prosecutors the tools to effect real change.

Even if there are adequate animal protection laws and regulations, unless we invest in the training of our law enforcement and solicitors those who break the law will get away with it. Using my story as an example again, had I not been on scene explaining the details of

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the situation and urging the officers they would most likely have not pursued the case. I say that not because the officers didn't care but because they didn't know what they were dealing with. To their own admission they don't handle animal calls. The detective who was lead on the famous Caitlyn the dog case admitted that he had received no training on animal cruelty and had to rely on my position for help with the case. We know that training is needed and many officers want to be better trained in their field. But there is a state wide lack of investment in training in animal control and cruelty investigations. There are currently only 2 certified humane animal investigators in the state of South Carolina, myself and a deputy for the Richland County Sheriff's Office. With better training, officers will be less reliant on outside consultants, and will be more effective at enforcement and at building strong animal abuse cases. And we can't forget that crimes against animals are closely linked to crimes of domestic violence. Taking animal cruelty seriously isn't just about protecting animals but also about protecting children, woman and the elderly.

Better trained law enforcement and prosecutors would allow local humane societies to redirect resources once spent on investigations to outreach and education. We know that the majority of animal abuse is unintentional and a result of neglect usually from a lack of resources or knowledge. Enforcement is the best approach for cases of intentional abuse but with unintentional abuse, intervention is more effective. Our targeted outreach program, Pets for Life, has gone into communities with the most at risk people and pet populations. These are often poor areas with high crime. By being proactive and bringing the shelter resources directly to the community we are helping families and preventing neglect. This can be as simple as offering dog training advice for a dog that always jumps up on people. Or as complicated as fixing a broken leg on a dog that got out and was hit by a car. For many families just affording the humane euthanasia is too much, never mind the cost of surgery to fix the leg. This can leave family pets to suffer at home without care not because they are not loved but because their family simply can't afford any other option. Programs like these build strong bonds between the shelter and the community and helps prevent animal abuse.

The animals in our state desperately need this change. We need regulations for any facility that provides care for animals. We need training for law enforcement and prosecutors so there are better equipped to handle animal crimes and investigations. And we need animal cruelty laws that are more specific and structured so that there isn't just one catch-all statute.

Thank you for the opportunity to address these issues before this committee and I, along with Charleston Animal Society, pledge our commitment to assist you in any way that we can.

