State of Louisiana
Animal Welfare Commission
Office of the Governor

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Report submitted to: Denham Springs Animal Control Officials and City of Denham Springs Government

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Representatives of the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section, recently completed an audit of your shelter facility located in Denham Springs, Louisiana. The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC) is very grateful for your cooperation in the audit. The goal of this audit is to assist local and parish governing agencies in evaluating shelter facilities and planning improvements. Please accept the following comments in the constructive manner in which they are intended.

The Denham Springs animal shelter provided OPH personnel ready access to animal and personnel records. The shelter staff was very accommodating and shared information freely. Hours of operation and emergency contact information was displayed at the entrance to the property in multiple locations. Evidence of adequate record keeping was observed by inspectors. The shelter provides services to the citizens of Denham Springs during regularly scheduled business hours. Fees are registered with the city and are included in the city's animal ordinances. The local animal ordinances include minimum sanitary standards for the shelter. The adoption rate at the shelter is admirable. A private company provides the shelter with a regular program of pest and rodent control. Veterinary care is provided by local veterinarians on an "as needed" basis. Euthanasia is carried out by veterinarians in the community and no animals are euthanized on site. Vaccine policies appear to be in line with accepted standards in Louisiana. Attempts are made by the shelter to protect animals from the sun and from other environmental elements.

The following suggestions are made based on the state statute (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.) listing minimum standards that may be adopted by parish governing authorities:

• Adequate local supervision: Louisiana law states that "shelters should be inspected at least once every six months by an authorized representative of the parish to determine compliance with the requirements" set forth in state statutes. Although the supervisory structure of the shelter was thoroughly explained to the auditors, no record of a formal system of inspection by any city or parish official was brought forth. LAWC suggests that the city establish a regular program of inspection and document the results for later examination by OPH auditors. This system of inspection should be recorded in a written policy.

• Posting of fees: There is no reception area. The fees for shelter services are not obviously posted on the property. Based upon state law, LAWC recommends that the fees be "visibly" posted. LAWC recommends that the fees be displayed in a manner that is apparent to shelter visitors. The fees should be displayed in large font on an appropriate sign or poster, in the area where the public enters the property.

• Food storage: Louisiana law states that "Supplies of food and bedding shall be stored in facilities which adequately protect such supplies against infestation or contamination by vermin." The auditors discovered that dry food is stored in bags on the floor and against the walls of the facility. These storage methods may hinder appropriate ventilation and hasten degradation of food products, as well as increase the potential for infestation by rodents or insects. The food should be elevated from the floor and ventilation of the products should be permitted by avoiding placement of the food directly against the walls. Managing the food on shelving or pallets should correct the problem.

The food storage area is also characterized by inadequate lighting. Pieces of food and other debris were discovered on shelving. Cleaning supplies, such as bleach, are stored along with the food. This is not a good practice and the cleaning supplies should be separated. The shelves should be maintained in a more sanitary condition. Many flies and other insects were observed in the food storage area. The refrigerator which is used as an employee refrigerator, the inspectors were told, is also used for medication storage. There is no dedicated refrigerator for keeping opened perishable animal foods. Separate refrigerators should be used for animal foods, medicine and employee food storage. Medical supply storage does not appear organized and medicine bottles do not give the appearance of being maintained in a sanitary manner.

Opened "fresh" animal foods that require refrigeration were discovered in the dog wards. The foods were obviously warm and were not maintained at the proper temperature. This failure to refrigerate perishable foods indicates a lack of control over food storage. This deficit could lend itself to outbreaks of foodborne animal illnesses. Again, proper refrigeration, adequate refrigeration facilities, and adoption of a food inventory control program and written policies addressing food storage and management would improve the situation.

Bedding appears to be cleaned adequately but is stored in animal ward areas. Cats that are allowed to roam freely come in contact with cleaned, stored bedding. Many of the free roaming cats were observed to be sneezing and many exhibited soiled and matted hair coats. Exposure of the bedding to these free roaming cats is an ineffective method of infection control and may exacerbate intramural transmission of disease. Bedding should be stored in areas away from animal wards and all animals should be confined.

• Waste disposal: Louisiana law states, "Disposal facilities shall be so provided and operated to minimize vermin infestations, odors and disease hazards." The general plan of waste disposal at the facility appears adequate. Fecal matter from dogs is hosed down to a gravitational trough sewage disposal system. This eventually makes its way to the city sewer system. Litter from cats is placed in garbage containers in the wards. The garbage in the plastic containers is removed in plastic liners and is placed in the sealed liners, within a dumpster. The dumpster is taken to a city landfill and disposed. Ward receptacles are large plastic garbage barrels with plastic liners. There are, however, no covers for the garbage barrels. Free roaming cats are free to enter the barrels. In addition, free roaming dogs can potentially overturn the barrels and access the contents. Ward garbage containers should be covered by plastic lids when not in use. Also animals of any species should not be permitted to freely roam in wards. This practice of exposing animals to garbage certainly potentiates the transmission of contagious diseases.

Odor throughout the facility and surrounding area is strong and offensive. The above suggested covering of garbage receptacles and improvements to general hygiene and cleanliness at the facility should serve to mitigate odor problems. Use of animal safe premise deodorizers might also prove helpful.

• Training: Louisiana law states that "shelter personnel should be trained as to animal health, disease control, humane care and treatment, animal control and transportation of animals," and that shelter workers "shall be able to identify and understand the principal animal diseases and injuries…" Only one

full time worker, the shelter director, is employed by the facility. This shelter director has no formal training in animal control. There is no evidence of a formal program of in-house or extra-mural training, standards, programs, or certifications to which employees or volunteers may aspire. LAWC recommends that a written program of training be established. Several public entities are available to provide assistance in training. The shelter is free to contact LAWC for referrals and further information.

• Primary enclosures: Louisiana law states that "primary enclosures shall be structurally sound and maintained in good repair to protect dogs and cats from injury, to contain them, and to keep predators out," and "constructed and maintained so as to enable the dogs and cats to remain dry and clean." The smaller primary enclosures for housing cats and small dogs are of painted metal or galvanized construction, cages of the type intended for temporary housing of animals for short periods of time. The paint on many of the primary structures is pitted or missing and many of the cages exhibit significant rust. These conditions are not conducive to sanitation and are not resistant to accumulation of substrate that may promote bacterial growth. Stainless steel or non-porous fiberglass cages are preferred and would provide surfaces that are much more easily sanitized, are resistant to corrosion and the resulting accumulation of organic debris. Until the suggested changes are made, workers at the facility should practice a more intense program of sanitation. Several of the cages show signs of a buildup of unwanted materials, such as animal hair. This accumulation of matter indicates that cages may not be maintained in as clean a condition as is desirable.

In several cat enclosures thin chicken wire is used for caging. This type of material is easily damaged. Chicken wire is also installed in the "ringworm" ward, where cats and dogs are housed together. Chicken wire can be easily damaged by dogs, even puppies. This chicken wire caging is not surrounded by secondary caging (the chicken wire leads directly to the exterior). The construction and position of these cages does not pose an optimally secure situation and escape by residents or intrusion by predators is possible.

In some of the exterior dog runs, chain link fencing is damaged. In one area a brick is being used to hold down the fencing and plug the defect. These defects could facilitate the escape of animals or could allow a larger animal to be trapped within caging. LAWC recommends that the fencing be monitored and chain link damage be repaired immediately and in a more permanent fashion.

Old plastic containers or cage shells are often used for bedding in individual dog runs. Besides an often unsanitary appearance, many of these items show signs of damage from chewing. These types of containers may be chewed by larger dogs and can produce small bits of plastic that may be ingested by dogs, possibly causing GI tract obstruction or choking hazard. The recommendation is that objects be removed from caging when damaged to the point of creating a potential hazard.

• There is one restroom located at the facility. There are two additional sinks and a tub in the animal wards. There is no sink located in the restroom, although the restroom opens into the cat ward that contains a sink. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state, "Facilities such as washrooms, basins, or sinks, shall be provided to maintain cleanliness among animal caretakers." Additional wash basins are desirable in animal wards or animal contact areas. Improvement of the restroom facility, which features a hole in the back wall, is needed to ensure privacy of employees. Signs instructing employees to wash hands after using the restroom before returning to work are helpful in promoting hygiene. General improvements to the condition of plumbing facilities and in the number of wash basins would increase the ability of employees to practice good hygiene and effective infection control. Until these improvements in washroom facilities and increases in wash basin facilities are made, the shelter should consider installation of several hand sanitizer stations throughout all areas of the facility.

• The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "shelter shall be provided for all dogs and cats kept outdoors when atmospheric temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit," and that "the ambient temperature…not be allowed to fall below fifty degrees Fahrenheit." The inspectors were told that space heaters are provided in most facilities when the temperature drops to forty degrees Fahrenheit. LAWC suggests that the threshold for providing heat be increased to fifty degrees Fahrenheit. The use of space heaters, although potentially capable of providing adequate heat to animal housing areas, must be employed with intense oversight to ensure that the heaters are utilized properly. Certainly safer and more efficient heating systems should be contemplated for future installation at the facility should resources become available.

• State statutes also require that "shelter from sunlight" and from "rain or snow" be provided. The shelter staff labors intensively to fulfill these requirements, but cover is often provided by impervious tarps. More permanent cover is recommended.

• The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "indoor housing facilities for dogs and cats shall have ample light, by natural or artificial means, or both, of good quality and well distributed. Such lighting shall provide uniformly distributed illumination of sufficient light intensity to permit routine inspection and cleaning during the entire working period." The inspectors found the lighting to be adequate in some areas and poor in others, certainly not uniformly distributed light. Many of the darker areas are in animal housing areas and some are in the housing areas designated as treatment areas for certain classes of diseases. This inconsistency of quality lighting may also lend to the problems with lack of adequate hygiene. Signs of chronic buildup of unwanted substances on surfaces and caging are obviously worse in the poorly lit areas. Proper light/dark cycles and subdued lighting are sometimes desired and are beneficial, at times, to the animal's environment. Rheostats can be installed to diminish lighting at desired times, but sufficient cleaning is problematic in inadequate light conditions.

• The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "floors and walls of animal holding areas shall be constructed of smooth, moisture impervious material and shall be accessible for cleaning." The shelter is characterized by concrete floors throughout the facility. As to be expected some of the concrete floors are cracked. Inquiries to shelter personnel on the frequency of application of sealants to the floors were inconsistently addressed. LAWC recommends that the floors be sealed annually to reduce porosity and preserve the surfaces. There are thick coatings of animal hair on many interior surfaces and thick accumulations of hair are apparent on ceiling ducts and conduit.

Several floors in indoor areas are constructed of unpainted, unsealed wood. This is the case in the respiratory isolation, special needs, and "ringworm" wards. These floors are too porous to be used in healthy animal wards, much less in wards where contagious diseases are intended to be controlled. Floors should be covered with impervious, non porous surfaces and cats should not be allowed to roam freely. Large pens for healthy cat colonies can be utilized, but these large pens should be maintained in the same manner as cages; disinfected, limited to a fixed population of cats, etc. Animals should be isolated for two weeks, tested for contagious disease, and vaccinated prior to entry into such colonies. Cats should not be free to roam in food preparation, animal housing, or work areas.

Many of the walls in the cat wards are of particle board construction with a smooth painted surface. However walls are not insulated and are very thin in several areas. These structural deficiencies add to the problems containing odor and in insulating animals against heat and cold. As stated previously, a very unpleasant, strong odor was present in and around the facility and may be due to the density of the animal population, poor ventilation, inadequate construction, and/or poor hygiene. Walls in dog runs are of concrete block construction. Many of the runs featured unpainted and unsealed concrete blocks. Walls were also observed not to be sanitized properly. Many do not exhibit a clean appearance.

• Galvanized tin roofing appears to be damaged in several spots which could facilitate problems with environmental elements. Exposed wiring and open switches are evident throughout the facility and could be a hazard to employees. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state, "Housing facilities for dogs and cats shall be structurally sound and shall be maintained in good repair, to protect the animal from injury, to contain animals, and to restrict the entrance of other animals."

• Standing water did appear to pool in several interior and exterior areas of the facility. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state, "A suitable method shall be provided to rapidly eliminate excess water from indoor housing facilities." The pooled water is adequately addressed by the workforce present. However the inspectors observed intensive expense of labor to control the problem. Although resource intensive, correction to drainage and correction of floor depressions could somewhat ameliorate the situation. Until that time, the shelter is encouraged to continue to address the drainage deficiencies to maintain safe and dry floors.

Adoption of the following practices should serve to improve the public image of the facility, enhance health and safety of the animals and workers, and/or decrease the likelihood of legal incidents and public complaints.

Suggestions by LAWC to improve shelter management:

• There is no true isolation ward at the facility. Isolation areas should feature increased levels of hygiene and separation of animals. Animals should not be permitted to wander freely in these areas. The practice of permitting free roaming animals in isolation areas indicates a poor understanding of infection control practices. Several different etiologic agents can cause fungal infections and respiratory infections. It is imperative that animal to animal contact in such areas be reduced.

• Foot baths are maintained in entries and exits of respiratory and ringworm fungus "isolation" areas, but foot baths are small and were difficult for the auditors to use due to the relatively small size of the pans (They are actually litter pans.). Foot baths should be easy to step in and out of, therefore enhancing the likelihood that the baths will be used properly. Surfaces (walls, cages, floors) in fungal and respiratory disease isolation areas should be free of debris, clean and nonabsorbent. The auditors observed that these surfaces were not clean, often showing signs of chronic buildup of debris, and are often constructed of porous material.

• Inquiries into the decision process on determining which animals require isolation were not met with clear explanations of the procedure. The procedure for determining confinement to isolation areas should be spelled out in a written policy to facilitate compliance and to enhance training of employees and volunteers. The same lack of clarity was observed regarding decisions to return animals to the general shelter population. A procedure for determining the end of the isolation period should also be recorded in the form of a formal written policy.

• The facility is large enough that animals entering the facility could be placed in relative isolation for a period of time (two weeks is usually the suggestion) before mixing with the general shelter population. In order for this type of infection control to exist, the shelter must be managed in a more organized and sanitary manner. LAWC is a potential source of expertise to create such protocols and procedures. At one point the auditors were told that animals were isolated in cages in the hallways. This is obviously problematic. A dedicated isolation area for both dogs and cats is recommended and appears feasible.

• Signs of respiratory disease were observed in several cats free in the facility (cats not restricted to the respiratory isolation ward). Shelter personnel confirmed that respiratory disease, fungal skin disease and scabies are common problems at the facility. The shelter reported that parvovirus and distemper are not problems at the facility; however LAWC has received reports from several veterinarians in the area that parvovirus and distemper have been observed in shelter animals, despite the shelter's vaccination program. The lack of isolation of sick animals and the observed lack of adequate infection control indicate that control of parvovirus and distemper, if not a problem presently, may be a problem periodically at the facility. Periodic problems with diseases and distribution of sick animals throughout the community often result in a poor public image of the shelter which can negatively influence adoption rates.

• All diseased animals at this facility are treated. This reinforces the need for isolation of the sick. Proper infection control is most important in this type of facility because animals are retained for long periods of time.

• The facility houses several hundred animals and retains only one full-time employee. Although a large volunteer staff is employed at the facility, the large number of animals in residence requires a larger staff. It is intuitive to conclude that the cause of many problems at the shelter is understaffing. Additional full-time trained staff would greatly benefit the facility. Additional training for volunteers is also desirable.

• The shelter provides veterinary care to impounded animals. This is a noble enterprise and certainly is a humane practice that should serve to increase the adoptability of resident animals. The shelter transports sick animals to veterinary practices in both Livingston and East Baton Rouge Parish. A more effective and efficient mode of supplying veterinary care would be a system in which contract veterinary care could be provided on-site. This would reduce stress to animals that require care and would reduce the potential of transmission of highly contagious diseases, such as parvovirus and distemper, to pets in the general public.

• The shelter manager and several volunteers indicated that the absence of a parish shelter is creating an undue burden on the Denham Springs municipal shelter. The absence of a parish facility is contributing to the overcrowded conditions at the Denham Springs shelter and is taxing the present workforce and the shelter's limited resources. This is a conundrum that city officials should address with parish officials. The growth of population in Livingston Parish and surrounding areas certainly argues for the creation of a parish facility.

• Organization of food storage, bedding, and cleaning supplies appears haphazard. Cleaned litter pans are often stored in areas where cats roam freely, thus eliminating any barrier for animal to animal transmission of disease. A written plan for supply management and dedicated areas for storage, separate from animal wards, would be helpful.

• In the inside primary cat ward, the floor is cleaned only with water. The director is concerned that free-roaming cats in the ward would be negatively affected by chlorine or other disinfectants irritating the pads of the feet. Cleaning floors by hosing with water is inadequate to control infection. Milder, effective disinfectants other than bleach solutions are commercially available and it is recommended that these solutions be used even when concern for animal contact exists.

• Louisiana's Revised Statutes state that litter boxes should be cleaned daily and that litter be replaced on a weekly basis. The litter boxes are cleaned and litter replaced in the suggested manner. Some litter boxes are stainless steel construction, some are plastic. Some of the plastic litter boxes appear to be worn or damaged from chewing. Damaged plastic may not be conducive to thorough disinfection and, as stated

previously, could compromise safety. LAWC recommends that, for both safety and cleaning purposes, damaged litter boxes be removed and replaced.

• The Revised Statutes also state that in multiple cat rooms or wards, cats be provided with elevated resting surfaces. The shelter is in compliance with the requirement for resting surfaces. The items used for cats to rest upon are often pieces of old cages, plastic storage boxes, or other items that are not particularly conducive to thorough sanitation. None of the items appeared to be adequately cleaned at the time of the visit to the facility.

• No animals are euthanized at this facility. When necessary, animals are euthanized at local veterinary clinics using intravenous euthanasia solution. LAWC considers lethal injection the most humane process of euthanasia and the shelter should be complimented on its decision to utilize this method. LAWC recognizes, however, that a preferable procedure would be to contract with a veterinarian to perform such procedures at the facility itself. Conducting euthanasia at the facility would eliminate the need to transport aggressive or ill animals, and would eliminate the additional stress of transportation. On-site euthanasia would also reduce exposure of the community to contagious diseases.

• A consensus of a committee of four persons, the shelter director, the chief volunteer and two additional volunteers, is required before a decision is made to euthanize an animal. LAWC recommends that this procedure be documented in writing in the form of a standard shelter policy, therefore eliminating any perception by the public that the decision is reached arbitrarily or capriciously.

• This report states repeatedly the importance of written policies for several procedures at public animal shelters. LAWC recommends that the shelter develops written policies for storage of food and supplies, shelter hygiene, employee training, isolation of animals, euthanasia, feeding, and shelter oversight.

• The shelter is grossly overcrowded. Overcrowding can lead to stress which promotes disease and limits recovery from illnesses. Community housing and a free-roaming resident population permits transmission of diseases for which resident animals are not routinely tested, such as feline leukemia virus in cats and distemper virus in dogs. LAWC may be able to assist in suggesting means of reducing overcrowded conditions at the facility. Several methods for reducing overcrowding may be considered (e.g. increasing and improving adoption programs, utilizing foster care, enlarging and improving the facility, developing, improving and adhering to euthanasia polices on ill, aggressive or unadoptable animals).

This concludes the report. OPH will request the statistics from calendar year 2009 in early January. Please be vigilant for the request.

Thanks again to the Denham Springs Animal Shelter for its cooperation in this audit. LAWC recognizes the shelter's dedication to humane animal control and animal welfare in Louisiana.

Submitted by: The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

Susan Schneider

Susan Schneider, Commissioner