



# Fairfax County Animal Services Consolidation Proposal

The Department of Animal Sheltering (DAS) and the Police Department (FCPD) propose to unite animal care and control functions under DAS, to:



- Promote safety for all the county’s residents and animals.
- Expand service delivery: connect pet owners with a range of shelter services.
- Establish a model that is recognized in the animal services field as the most effective model for providing community-centered animal services.

## Proposal

Based on extensive review of current operations, those of neighboring and national benchmark jurisdictions, and industry best practices, **FCPD and DAS recommend uniting animal care and control under DAS. Animal protection laws will be enforced by Animal Control Officers (ACOs) who report to a chief ACO under the director of DAS.** This model has worked successfully for decades in Alexandria, Arlington County, Prince William County, Loudoun County, the District of Columbia, Montgomery County and in jurisdictions nationwide. This consolidation will result in greater efficiency, improved service delivery, cost savings and better alignment with county equity goals.

## Background

While made with the best intentions for our community and its animals, Fairfax County’s 2016 decision to separate animal care and control functions between the Department of Animal Sheltering (DAS) and the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) did not result in a successful integration of two separate departments working together to provide animal services. In the pursuit of continuous improvement, DAS and FCPD have jointly studied best practice operations in other jurisdictions and reviewed national industry standards.

## Safety

The safety of our community is always our top priority. The proposed model builds on our success when it comes to safety by emphasizing positive relationships with residents and encouraging compliance and cooperation through a tiered enforcement model. **Animal Control Officers have the power to fully enforce state and local codes pertaining to the proper care, treatment and control of animals in Fairfax County,** including but not limited to: issuing warnings and citations; investigating animal cruelty and neglect; investigating animal bites and enforcing rabies control and quarantine regulations. ACOs will work with FCPD when complex criminal investigations are required.

Fairfax County is the safest jurisdiction of its size in the country. **Most emergency calls for animal services are requests for assistance with injured, ill, orphaned, or stray animals** or involve minor code violations. These requests for assistance are more appropriately handled by an ACO.

Year	Number of animal related calls for service	*Number of cases requiring search warrants	*Number of Custodial Arrests
2023	18,004	3	1
2022	17,845	1	0
2021	19,083	2	1

\*\*FCPD detectives and patrol officers currently provide support to APP for arrests and executing search warrants; therefore, the transition to ACOs would not require a procedural change.

## Industry Best Practices.

**The consolidation of animal services under DAS will bring Fairfax County into alignment with all our neighboring jurisdictions, most major metropolitan areas, and industry best practices.**

"NACA believes that by unifying animal sheltering and animal control under the same leadership, agencies can foster a more comprehensive and impactful approach to animal welfare, achieve more positive outcomes and make a lasting impact on the lives of animals and the people who care for them."

- **National Animal Control Association**, the premier certification agency for Animal Control Officers

**The proposed model does not replace enforcement for animal cruelty or neglect.** Instead, the model encourages consideration of a diverse range of solutions addressing the root causes of the animal welfare issue prior to consideration of punitive measures.

## One-Fairfax

**The proposed approach is in alignment with the One Fairfax Policy and ensures consideration is given to the impact of systemic poverty and structural inequality on pet ownership.** ACOs will orient their work through the lens of support and resources for pet owners, with the goal of compliance and keeping families together with their pets when possible. ACOs will connect pet owners with a range of services including behavior and training support, free pet food and supplies, the PetHaven Program for victims of domestic abuse, pet-friendly housing support, and free and low-cost veterinary care.

**The proposed model results in better outcomes for historically underserved communities.** "The current emphasis on enforcement and punishment in animal control policy has disproportionately negative impacts on low-income communities in the United States (US), particularly people of color...Reallocating the resources that have historically gone towards enforcement in communities to efforts that provide support in addressing the root causes of animal welfare concerns is needed to improve outcomes for pets in historically underserved communities."<sup>14</sup>

**The proposed model is consistent with programs operated by the Community Services Board and Department of Family Services.** Approximately two-thirds of County residents share their home with at least one pet. Strengthening support for pet owners can also provide a pathway to connect people with other county social benefits and services.

## Transition

Current APP officers will have the opportunity to convert to Animal Control Officers positions with DAS or convert to a police officer position within FCPD. **APP officer pay and retirement will be unaffected by the change.** The Chief ACO will provide consistency, oversee strategic and operational efficiency, and lead the ACOs in embracing industry best practices. The new organizational structure will create opportunities for specialization, advanced training, and growth.

<sup>14</sup> Hawes SM, Hupe T, Morris KN (2020) Punishment to support: the need to align animal control enforcement with the human social justice movement. *Animals* 10:1902. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10101902>