

Response to Questions on the FY 2019 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Smith

Question: Please provide more detail and background information related to the Consumer Protection Program – Rabies issue that is identified on the Human Services Resource Plan.

Response:

The Human Services Resource Plan includes 1/1.0 FTE position in the Health Department to monitor domestic pets for potential rabies exposure. While this position is not included in the FY 2019 Advertised Budget Plan, the Health Department has identified an existing position for this purpose. It is anticipated that the Health Department can absorb the costs associated with this position during FY 2018 due to a greater than expected flexibility as a result of position vacancies across the agency. It is unclear whether the department will be able to continue to absorb these costs in FY 2019 and future years due to a \$350,000 personnel services budget reduction that is included in the FY 2019 Advertised Budget Plan along with increased efforts to fill vacant positions. Staff will continue to monitor the department's budget and an adjustment may be requested at a quarterly review.

Fairfax County has one of the highest incidences of rabies in the nation, with 40 to 60 rabid animals identified each year. The main tool for preventing rabies in domestic animals is vaccinating pets; however, as per the Fairfax County Code, Chapter 41.1 Animal Control and Care, it may also be necessary to confine a domestic animal to the owner's property for 10 days or 45 to 120 days, depending on the vaccination status of the pet (41.1-2-8) to ensure rabies control and limit potential human exposures. The Health Department works with the Police Department's Animal Protection Police Unit to identify all humans and domestic animals potentially exposed to rabies to prevent them from developing a rabies infection, which is nearly 100 percent fatal. Section 41.1-2-9 outlines that *"the owner of an animal that has bitten a person or any person having knowledge of any animal which has bitten a person shall immediately notify the Animal Services Division or the County Police Department. The owner of such animal shall permit the Director of Health or any person charged with enforcement of this Chapter to immediately examine such animal"* and confine it, as outlined more specifically in the chapter. Furthermore, it states that *"any such animal shall be released from confinement after the ten-day period only upon authorization of a licensed veterinarian or any person charged with enforcement of this Chapter."* The only way to definitively rule out a potential rabies exposure to a human from an animal is to test the animal for rabies (which requires euthanasia) or verify that it is healthy after its confinement period, referred to as a "health check."

Health checks are a requirement of the Fairfax County Code and recommended by the state. In lieu of traditional health checks directly by County staff, the current County system relies on the pet owner to call or self-attest online about the health status of their animal at the end of the confinement period. All other jurisdictions in Virginia make direct contact with the animal owner to conduct health checks after 10, 45 and 120-day confinements either by telephone or in person to ensure a healthy animal at the end of its confinement period. Last year, the Animal Protection Police Unit fielded 1,998 events that were considered rabies related, 1,941 of which required health checks after their confinement period. Unfortunately, the health status of most of those animals is not known because the compliance rate with the reporting system currently in place is less than 20 percent. In addition, violations of 10-day confinement agreements by animal owners are known to occur and could potentially result in cases

of human rabies in the community. The number of rabies related events reported in the County has increased by 30 percent in the past five years and this trend is expected to continue as the County's population density increases and the human and domestic animal population come into closer contact with wildlife.

To bring the County in line with the standard of practice in the Mid-Atlantic region, where the raccoon variant rabies is endemic, a position is required in order to complete health checks on all animals in 10-day, 45-day and 120-day confinements; consult on confinement mechanisms with the pet owner; track patients to ensure that they receive their rabies follow-up vaccinations on time; collect animals for rabies testing when circumstances dictate very rapid response or cross-jurisdictional issues arise; enter data in a rabies database so trend analysis can be performed; and serve as back-up to the Rabies Program Manager to ensure continuity of program needs. The department currently is on-call 24/7 for rabies related emergencies and this position will support the continuation of this service need.

In keeping with County regulations, the State Model Plan and standards of practice in surrounding jurisdictions, a new service model is proposed, in which the Animal Protection Police Unit would continue to generate and send reports of animal bites, and other potential rabies exposures that occur in the County, to the Health Department for review and execute the confinement agreements with animal owners. In this model, the Health Department would take on the responsibility of closing all confinements with a health check.

Communication and management of the Rabies Control Program is ongoing and the actions proposed in the new model would be inserted into the MOU the Health Department has with the Animal Protection Police Unit. The Animal Shelter will be included in these discussions. The Animal Protection Police Unit, the Shelter and the Health Department meet regularly to evaluate the roles and responsibilities of respective agencies and provide a mechanism for communicating and resolving issues as they arise and to ensure continued positive outcomes in the Rabies Control program.