



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 13, 2024

TO: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (BOS)

FROM: Larry Zaragoza, DEnv, Chair
Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC)

SUBJECT: Fairfax County Animal Services Consolidation Proposal in the Proposed FY 2025 Budget

EQAC does not support the current Fairfax County Animal Services Consolidation Proposal and recommends the Board of Supervisors remove this item from the FY2025 budget proposal.

This proposal would bring the Animal Protection Police Officer (APPO) Program and the Wildlife Biologist Program under the Department of Animal Sheltering (DAS) and downgrade Animal Protection Police Officers to Animal Control Officers (ACO). However, the proposal lacks data to support need for this reorganization. From a wildlife perspective, EQAC has followed and appreciated the work that Dr. Katie Edwards has led as the county's wildlife biologist, and we are concerned that this reorganization will threaten her ability to continue her work with the same efficiency and effectiveness.

EQAC's most significant concern with the proposal is with that the function of the DAS is fundamentally different than the function of the County's wildlife conservation programs. DAS has an emphasis on the survival of domestic animals, utilizing available resources to rehab domestic animals that may be found injured or without at home. This is emphasized in the presentation made at the January 30, 2024 BOS Safety and Security Committee Meeting where very little discussion was provided on how this proposed model can maintain the success of the Deer Management Program or the Geese Management Programs. The DAS methods are not a practical approach to addressing invasive or unbalanced wildlife populations that harm our natural ecosystems or treatment of wildlife where euthanasia can be the most humane action for an injured wild animal rather than taking it to a wildlife rehabilitator. The Trap, Neuter, and Release program of domestic cats is also in direct conflict with protecting the ecological balance of our native wildlife. Furthermore, the current state statute limits the authority of the ACO to take actions to help wildlife that the APPO can take.¹

¹ Possession, transportation, and release of wildlife by authorized persons:
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title4/agency15/chapter30/section50/>

Seven years ago, when the current structure was put in place, the County invested in a deep dive into this topic, resulting in a report with data and context. At the time, “Feedback from Michelle Welch, the assistant attorney general who reviews all animal law issues in Virginia, is that Fairfax County is the gold standard for animal control. She believes that this is the standard to which other animal control units should aspire.”² In the county’s 2016 organizational review by the Animal Services Division of the Police Department, the report states “For the wildlife biologist, it was noted that the support of animal control officers and patrol officers is critical to the deer management program.”²

No such thorough consideration was made public for this proposed change prior to its inclusion with the FY2025 budget proposal. According to the County’s website, the proposed model aims to promote safety for all the county’s residents and animals, bring our county in alignment with industry best practices, expand service delivery to our community, and optimize county resources. However, no data or further details have been provided for what this means. The information the county provided on the reorganization does not sufficiently demonstrate that the proposed model aligns with industry best practices for wildlife management and does not provide supportive empirical or quantitative data that demonstrates the proposed move would work better than the existing structure.

Furthermore, this proposal risks reducing wildlife support by removing authority to enforce state wildlife laws (e.g. mistreatment of wildlife, regulatory hunting weapons practices) and places that responsibility on Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) or standard police officers³, both with limited resources to do so. In fact, the current partnership of the APPO and Wildlife Biologist Program under the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) received a letter of appreciation from the DWR which states the “operational link between wildlife professionals and sworn wildlife-trained law enforcement officers provides a holistic and effective strategy in maintaining public safety, protection natural resources, ensuring ecological balance, and providing a robust response to the needs of the county’s residents regarding a full range of wildlife management opportunities and challenges.”⁴

Should the proposal be further pursued, EQAC recommends undertaking a comprehensive analysis on the potential impacts and benefits of the proposed action. This information should be shared with Fairfax County residents through a robust outreach campaign to address public comments regarding the proposal. This analysis with public comment should be captured in a

²<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/sites/police/files/assets/images/helpfulinfo/animal%20services/asdorganizationalstudyreportwithappendix072816.pdf> page 14 and page 21.

³ Animal Protection Police Officer: <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title15.2/chapter8/section15.2-836.1/>

⁴ Rebecca K. Gwynn, Deputy Director of Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources to Dr. Katherine Edwards, Fairfax County Police Department Animal Services Division. Letter of Appreciation. October 25, 2023.

report and presented to the Board to make an informed decision on whether to carry forward with the draft budget proposal.

In closing, the proposed reorganization does not outline how this reorganization would result in better outcomes for wildlife in the County. EQAC recommends the Board of Supervisors remove this item from the FY2025 budget proposal.

EQAC thanks the Board for your attention to this important issue and welcomes questions.

cc: Tom Arnold, Deputy County Executive
Chief Kevin Davis, Chief of Police, FCPD
Bob Blakley, Deputy Chief of Police, FCPD
Captain Eric Ivancic, Commander, Animal Services Division, FCPD
Reasa Currier, Director, DAS
Dr. Katherine Edwards, Fairfax County Wildlife Biologist, FCPD
John Morrill, Acting Director, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination
EQAC

Attachment: Letter from Rebecca K. Gwynn, Deputy Director, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources