

COUNCIL FILE #19-0600

BUDGET ADVOCATES REPORT-BACK ON QUESTION NO. 699 -ANIMAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT – FUNDING FOR SIX ANIMAL CARE TECHNICIANS (ACTs) TO REPLACE CURRENT ACTs ACTING AS VOLUNTEER LIAISONS

By Jeffrey Mausner, Budget Advocate, Region 3.

To: Honorable Members of the Budget and Finance Committee

The Animal Services Department (LAAS) has requested funding for six new Animal Care Technician (ACT) positions, to replace the six ACTs who are currently acting as Volunteer Liaisons at each shelter. (These 6 positions have also been referred to as “Volunteer Coordinators.” It is the same position with either name.) The City Administrative Officer (CAO), in a Report-Back dated May 8, 2019 (Memo No. 203), notes that the Department has 10 vacant ACT positions, and recommends that the Department fill its existing vacancies before additional funding and position authorities are provided.

The CAO recommendation does not recognize the status of the 10 vacant ACT positions or distinguish between natural on-going replacement of current positions and the important role that the Volunteer Liaisons perform.

Status of Filling the 10 Vacant Animal Care Technician Positions.

The 10 vacant ACT positions are the result of very recent natural attrition from retirements, promotions, and resignations. Four vacancies occurred at the end of April as a result of promotions from ACT to ACT Supervisor. Two of the vacancies became available March 31 as a result of a transfer to another department and a retirement. LAAS has six selected candidates awaiting appointment approval from Personnel and has already requested to fill the remaining four vacancies through Targeted Local Hire (TLH). LAAS expects that all ten of the vacancies will be filled before the end of this fiscal year.

ACT Duties That Are Not Being Performed Because Volunteer Liaisons Are Performing Volunteer Liaison Tasks.

ACTs (including the 10 which are currently being hired) perform the following essential animal care duties at the six City animal shelters: intake of stray animals and those surrendered by their owners, feeding the animals, cleaning the kennels, assisting medical staff, transporting animals to mobile adoption events and between shelters when there is overcrowding at a particular shelter, enrichment and interaction with the animals to help make them more adoptable, showing animals for adoption to the public and rescue by animal rescue organizations, and generally making sure that things run smoothly at the shelters and with the animals.

There is a shortage of ACTs at the shelters. LAAS staff is approximately 100 less than it was prior to the recession in 2008, even though the largest City shelter, South/Chesterfield Square, has been added since then. Even after the 10 funded ACT positions are filled, and even if the 6 additional ACT positions are funded, there will still be a shortage of ACTs. As things currently

stand, and which will be made permanent if the 6 new ACT positions are funded, the Volunteer Liaisons are not performing the ACT tasks set forth above because of their duties with the volunteers. The 10 ACTs replacing recently lost ACTs will not make up for the loss of the 6 Volunteer Liaisons' inability to perform these duties.

Having Full-Time Volunteer Liaisons at Each Shelter Saves the City a Tremendous Amount of Money in the Long Term and Increases Safety of the Volunteers.

In 2018, shelter volunteers put in over 91,000 hours of service, the equivalent of 46 full-time employees; but the City and the animals are still losing out on thousands of free volunteer hours because of lack of adequate staffing. Increasing the number of volunteers and volunteer hours provides an exponential benefit of free labor to the City and improvement of quality of life for the animals, as well as improved and more efficient services for City residents patronizing the shelters.

The six additional Animal Care Technicians (to be hired through TLH) are needed to replace the six ACTs currently assigned as Volunteer Liaisons. The Volunteer Program has grown tremendously since LAAS instituted the Volunteer Liaisons. But it leaves a void in the completion of regular ACT duties in each of the shelters, as set forth above.

At the hearing on Monday May 6, the Volunteer Liaison for the West Valley Shelter, Charla Fales, related her own personal experience when, in the past, she was taken away from performing duties as a Volunteer Liaison at the West L.A. Shelter, and had to go back to performing regular ACT duties. The number of volunteers dropped from 177 to 51. Think of the loss to the City this entailed, and the much greater loss that will result if the Volunteer Liaisons at all six shelters are lost.

The Volunteer Liaisons also perform an essential safety function. As well as safety training for the volunteers, one of the tasks of the Volunteer Liaisons is to level (rate) the dogs on the difficulty of handling them, to match the levels of the volunteers. There are Level 1, 2, and 3 dogs and volunteers. Especially for new volunteers, it is important that they not try to take a dog out of the kennel that is above their level. I've been a volunteer at the West Valley Shelter for almost 7 years, and on occasion I still ask the Volunteer Liaison for help in getting a new Level 3 dog or un-leveled dog out of its kennel the first time. Failure to have a Volunteer Liaison to help assure the safety of volunteers could create potential liability for the City if a volunteer is injured.

Thank you for your further consideration of this matter.

Sincerely, Jeffrey Mausner, Budget Advocate

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(For identification purposes)

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