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August 16, 2023

The Honorable Karen Bass
Mayor, City of Los Angeles
200 N. Spring Street, Room 303
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: Ms. Heleen Ramirez, Office of the Mayor

**RE: REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL REGARDING VETERINARIAN VACANCY RATES AND
DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES EFFORTS TO FILL VETERINARIAN VACANCIES**

Recommendation for Council Action, subject to the approval of the Mayor:

NOTE AND FILE this Memorandum as this Memorandum is for informational purposes only

Discussion:

This report is provided in response to the April 26, 2023 Council motion (CF # 23-0452) that requested the Department of Animal Services (Department) to report back on: the current vacancy rate for veterinarians within the Department, the current salary range for Department veterinarians, salary ranges in other jurisdictions and the private sector for veterinarians with comparable job descriptions to Department veterinarians, Department recruitment efforts to fill veterinarian vacancies and recommendations to expeditiously hire veterinarians.

The Department Medical Services Team is responsible for: evaluating all animals entering each Animal Services Center, providing preventative veterinary services (vaccines, internal/external parasite control, etc.) to all dogs and cats entering each Animal Services Center, implanting microchips into dogs, cats and rabbits for permanent identification purposes, providing day-to-day veterinary services (antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, etc.) to sick/injured animals, providing emergency critical care (including surgery, addressing viral outbreaks, etc.) to sick and injured animals, examining animals held during animal cruelty cases and testifying on the animal's condition in court, facilitating the sterilization of shelter animals through on-site and off-site clinics/veterinarians and relieving the irremediable suffering of animals. The Department Medical Services Team currently has the following position authorities: one Chief Veterinarian, one Veterinarian III, four Veterinarian II positions and thirty-one Registered Veterinary Technician positions, to provide these services at the six City-staffed shelter locations.

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SUBJECT: VETERINARIAN VACANCY RATES AND DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES
EFFORTS TO FILL VETERINARIAN VACANCIES

Of the five Veterinarian positions, the Department currently has one vacancy. The Veterinarian position assigned to the Harbor Animal Services Center (957 N. Gaffey St. San Pedro, CA 90731) has been vacant since February 2022. In March 2022, the Department interviewed two candidates to fill the vacant position. Both candidates declined the offers stating that the Harbor location was geographically inconvenient for them as it related to their daily commutes. When another Veterinarian position became vacant at the North Central Animal Services Center in June 2022, one of the Veterinarians the Department interviewed in March 2022 accepted an offer to fill that vacant position, leaving the position at the Harbor location to remain vacant.

The Department has had considerable difficulty trying to fill the vacant Veterinarian position. Since the position became vacant in February 2022, the Chief Veterinarian has had to serve as the primary veterinary service provider at both the South Los Angeles and Harbor Animal Services Centers. The Department has worked closely with the Personnel Department to recruit for and advertise the position. The Personnel Department has posted advertisements for the position on the Personnel Department website and all of its social media accounts on multiple occasions as well as on www.indeed.com. The Department has posted advertisements on the Department's website and social media accounts on multiple occasions, as well as paying to place the ads multiple times on various industry trade sites such as the California Veterinary Medical Association job board, and the Association of Shelter Veterinarians job board. Department staff (both past and present) has reached out to various industry connections nationwide to share information regarding the vacancy.

Despite all of the efforts listed above, there has not been another applicant interested in interviewing for the position. The sites where the position advertisement has been posted report that there has been engagement with the posts in that visitors to the site will view the position but no one has applied as a result.

There may be several factors contributing to the lack of interest in the position. There have been a number of reports and a general consensus that there is currently a shortage of veterinary staff throughout the industry. According to a July 2022 article published in The Atlantic, "More Americans are getting pets, while the number of people going into the veterinary profession has not been keeping pace. By 2030, the U.S. will need nearly 41,000 additional veterinarians and nearly 133,000 credentialed vet techs, according to a recent Mars Veterinary Health report." The article goes on to discuss that the pandemic further exacerbated issues and trends that were already present within the industry. For instance, during the pandemic, many industry professionals that were at retirement age just retired immediately. They also stated that "the veterinary field also skews quite female, and mothers without child care quit or switched to more flexible remote work." Due to this shortage and the demand for services from a reduced professional pool, industry professionals are suffering from considerable burnout, and other risks to mental health. Per the article, the turnover rate for veterinarians is 16 percent. "Female veterinarians are also 3.5 times as likely to die by suicide as the general population, and male vets are about twice as likely, according to a 2018 CDC study."

In understanding this industry shortage of human resources and the many challenges veterinarians face, the Department recognizes that there is a need to make our positions more competitive if our goal is to recruit and retain top talent and fairly compensate our staff for conducting the taxing work of caring for all of the animals in our overcrowded shelters. Per the current Memorandum of Understanding for Professional Medical Services (MOU 10), the current salary range for our Veterinarian positions is: \$104,567 - \$152,904 for Veterinarian II and \$110,413 - \$161,423 for Veterinarian III. For recently hired veterinarians, MOU 10 allows for employees to earn two cash retention bonuses, \$1,000 after the first six months of employment and \$4,000 at the two-year mark. MOU 10 expires on December 30, 2023.

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There are not many animal shelter systems with a comparable size and scope to the City of Los Angeles. In doing a search for veterinarian salaries with municipalities of a comparable size and scope, we found that as of January 2021, the salary range for Veterinarians with the County of Los Angeles (County) is \$116,205 - \$165,343. The bargaining unit for these employees is currently negotiating with the County to increase salaries. As of May 5, 2023, the salary range for veterinarians employed by Orange County is \$132,184 - \$168,771. While posting the advertisements for the City of Los Angeles Harbor Veterinarian job opportunity, staff observed other opportunities with large non-profits in other California cities offering higher salaries. A Bakersfield SPCA ad for Shelter Veterinarian offered a salary of \$170,000 with negotiable relocation and sign-on bonuses. The HOPE Animal Foundation in Fresno California offered a salary range of \$160,000 - \$200,000 and a \$40,000 sign-on bonus. In addition to these examples there were many other job ads offering similar salary ranges and benefits.

Upon observing some of the disparities in what the City is able to offer potential candidates as compared to some other organizations, upon the advice of the Personnel Department, the Department referred this matter to the Employee Relations Division in the Office of the City Administrative Officer. The Employee Relations Division advised that these issues will be addressed as part of the negotiations for the next MOU for Professional Medical Services.

As noted above, the Department only has five Veterinarian position authorities and one Chief Veterinarian position. That means that we have fewer staff veterinarian positions than the number of shelter locations we operate. Because of this, the Chief Veterinarian does not have sufficient time to provide the amount of oversight and guidance for the staff veterinarians he would like to provide and must serve as the primary veterinarian for at least one shelter location (or more in the cases where we have a vacancy). The Department hopes to increase the capacity of our medical services team by increasing the number of Veterinarian position authorities through our FY 2024-25 budget requests. To make our current and future Veterinarian opportunities competitive with some of the other large local municipalities and other offers observed for positions in California, the Department would also like to be able to offer an increased, more competitive salary, higher retention bonuses as well as sign-on and relocation bonuses. It was also suggested that a location bonus may be ideal for locations that may be considered geographically inconvenient for most candidates, such as at our Harbor Animal Services Center.

Fiscal Impact:

This report is for informational purposes only. As presented, there is no impact on the City's General Fund.

If you have any questions on this matter, please contact Curtis Watts, Assistant General Manager via e-mail at curtis.watts@lacity.org.

Respectfully submitted,



Staycee Dains
General Manager