

**From:** [Suza Francina](#)  
**To:** [Clerk@theBoard](#); [LaVere, Matt](#)  
**Subject:** Public Comment from Suza Francina re: Ventura County Animal Services  
**Date:** Monday, September 11, 2023 7:28:35 AM  
**Attachments:** [Concerning Issues and Deaths at Ventura County Animal Services.docx](#)

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Public Comment from Suza Francina, Ojai City Council, Mayor Pro Tem  
VCAS Commissioner, 2016-2020 and 2020-2024  
Email: [Suzaojacitycouncil@gmail.com](mailto:Suzaojacitycouncil@gmail.com)

Thirteen years ago, I was one of the many Ventura County residents who demanded that VCAS hire a No-Kill Director who would create shelter conditions that would put an end to killing healthy adoptable animals.

Six years ago, when elected to my second term on the Ojai City Council, I began serving as a VCAS Commissioner. At the same time, I began participating in meetings with Ventura County rescue groups and volunteers.

I am writing today for three reasons:

**First**, to express my support for Lisa Koch's Initiative, known as Boston's Ordinance, (named after a dog she tried to adopt who was euthanized). I know that Ms. Koch has been criticized for her aggressive tactics but sometimes that is what is needed for those in leadership positions to pay attention and take action.

**Second**, I'm writing to plead with you to take seriously the ongoing complaints from volunteers and rescue groups. The BOS and Animal Commission need to authorize an independent review of what is happening at the shelter. Why has euthanasia (KILLING) of healthy animals increased? Why are rescues being denied the right to take out animals to foster and adopt? Why are so many volunteers leaving Ventura County Animal Services and the dogs and cats they love caring for?

I have repeatedly heard from various sources that dogs are not getting out of their cages and having healthy interactions with people and other dogs on a regular basis. More dogs than ever before are manifesting kennel stress and are developing behavior problems. VCAS is addressing this by killing these dogs

We need to gather the facts and find out if it's true that these dogs are not part of the statistics VCAS issues which claim that they have a high adoption and no kill rate.

**Third:** On September 6, Board Members and Commissioners received the attached seven page document entitled **Concerning Issues and Deaths at Ventura County Animal Services**.

This document is written and reviewed by people who wish to present the facts of what is going on at Ventura County Animal Services. This document respectfully asks for assistance from the BOS and Commissioners in getting to the bottom of some very distressing trends. These include:

**UPTICK IN UNNECESSARY EUTHANASIA: Please see attached document. Ten cases are cited and many more can be provided.**

The cases cited illustrate the multiple killings of dogs for behavioral reasons that could be addressed by a behaviorist and more volunteers/staff to walk and interact with the dogs.

**The attached document also notes concerns with Kittens, Stray Cats and Staffing Issues**

"We have two so-called behaviorists on staff. We are not sure what their job functions entail, but they rarely, if ever, are working with the dogs on their behavioral issues. Both are known to remain in their offices. One typically has her own dogs in the office with her. If they are too busy to work as behaviorists, a position strictly meant to work with the animals on their behavior is necessary.

**VOLUNTEER ISSUES:** It has become increasingly more difficult for volunteers, who are pouring their heart and soul into these dogs for the price of their free time, to find the desire/motivation to come in with so many dogs being euthanized for space. Shelter management states they don't euthanize for space, but as noted above, there are many innocuous reasons given for the killing of dogs when the shelter is full. This accounts for the drop in volunteer hours as much as the pandemic does at this point.

The Document concludes with asking the BOS and Commissioners to "Please consider this request for assistance."

---Suza Francina

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September 5, 2023

From Jane. Email rosspadilla1331@gmail.com

To the Board of Supervisors and VCAS Commissioners

This document is written and reviewed by people who wish only to present the facts of what is going on at Ventura County Animal Services. They do not endorse the misinformation and aggressive tactics taken by Lisa Koch, nor do they specifically wish to defend Shelter Director Jackie Rose. They wish only to present the facts of what is actually going on, and respectfully ask for your assistance in getting to the bottom of some very distressing trends.

#### **UPTICK IN UNECESSARY EUTHANASIA:**

**Frederick:** Frederick was a longer term stay at VCAS. When he first came to the shelter, he was a "green" dog. Green dogs are the easy dogs that any volunteer can take out. As his stay went on, Frederick became very reactive to other dogs. While he was still easy to handle if there were no dogs around, he became difficult to handle on a leash when other dogs were present, therefore requiring more experienced handlers to walk him. His level was changed in the system to show that he required more experienced handlers, however, he had many fans who could only walk easy dogs. Some of these handlers would change him back to green in the system so that they could continue to handle him.

The volunteer who took Frederick the day of the incident was only clear to walk green (easy) dogs. Frederick had already gotten away from this handler previously, which she did not share with the foster coordinator before leaving the property. Frederick's level had been changed back to green, indicating that he was an easy dog to the foster coordinator. If he had had more accurate information, he would've pulled a different dog for this particular handler that would be easier for her to handle.

After the incident, the handler initially gave a different version of what really happened. It was only after the owner of the other dog gave her statement that the handler's story changed. Frederick was euthanized a few days later, with no chance given to find a rescue for him. This incident happened due to handler error and systems put in place that allow anyone to change what is in the system. It is imperative that the color denoting the dog's behavior and volunteer handling remain accurate, and isn't changed because someone who isn't qualified to handle a dog wants to handle the dog.

Frederick was still adoptable, as an only dog, by a handler who could successfully keep a big dog on a leash. Many dogs are now muzzled when they go on walks to protect themselves and the general public. Frederick also could have benefitted from training by a behaviorist, whether it be one of the two behaviorists the shelter employs or by using the foundation to pay for training. Neither of the "behaviorists" on staff worked with him. The assessment of Frederick was strictly based on what was written in his file, and what could be observed standing outside his kennel. The shelter was over capacity at the time of his death.

**Grape:** Grape was returned from his first adoption because he didn't know how to walk on tile. Upon shelter review, it was noted that he was adopted and returned twice, which led to the ultimate decision that he was unpeaceable. It was never noted the first adopters returned him for his lack of tile walking skills.

Grape was not a big fan of small animals, and tolerated animals his size and bigger. His second adopters knew this, and took him to a dog park. They had him in the yard for big dogs. Another owner let his Chihuahua into the big dog yard, even though obviously his dog is small. Grape reacted in the way that

we knew he would, as it was known that he didn't like smaller animals. The owner broke up the fight, but accidentally got bit in the process. Grape was euthanized for acting in a manner consistent with what we have already known and disclosed to the adopter. There was no cry for a rescue, there was no attempt for some training, there was less than 24 hours given, as is typical from the shelter.

Neither of the "behaviorists" on staff worked with him. The assessment of Grape was strictly based on what was written in his file, and what could be observed standing outside his kennel. The shelter was over capacity at the time of his death.

**Dr. Jones:** Dr. Jones came to the shelter healing from many wounds, including being shot in the face. In fact, the Dr. was specifically added to his name due to the fact that he would be visiting a doctor often as he healed. Dr. Jones was successful as a foster, and was adopted. However, as one might expect, he has lingering trauma after being shot in the face. The adopters had reached into the room he was in to turn on a light. This sudden, unexpected movement triggered a fear reaction in the dog. His foster would have taken him back in and continued to work with him on his recovery—both mental and physical. Instead, she was not told about the decision until after the fact. She didn't even get to say goodbye or be in the room with the animal she had bonded with.

Dr. Jones was a prime candidate for training or a rescue. Once again, the foundation did not pay for training, and rescues were not notified of his pending euthanasia in order to pull him (being that he had a foster who would take him, and one of the many local rescues likely would've pulled him if given the proper notice).

Neither of the "behaviorists" on staff worked with him. The assessment of Dr. Jones was strictly based on what was written in his file, and what could be observed standing outside his kennel. The shelter was over capacity at the time of his death.

**Shadow:** A plea for Shadow initially went out in August of 2022. He was declining in the shelter, and needed a comfy place to go into a hospice situation, according to the shelter. A foster from Bakersfield stepped up. Although Shadow was showing signs of old age (specifically moving slower), and was a quirky eater (he wouldn't eat kibble unless it had broth or peanut butter in it to fancy it up, and preferred to eat veggies over kibble anyways), he thrived in foster. He even started to tolerate the other dog in the house—they even would go on walks together. During the entire year in foster, the foundation never assisted with the expenses of fostering him. Most of the fosters are local, and can come to the shelter easily for more food and other supplies. However, Bakersfield is not close, and this foster used her own funds to take care of a VCAS dog. To our knowledge, the foundation did not assist financially, although Jackie has stated in presentations numerous times that is what the foundation does.

His foster was unable to find another foster initially for her month long vacation, and reluctantly brought him back to the shelter. Knowing that the shelter had put him up for euthanasia a year prior, she (and many of the other volunteers) were nervous that the shelter would euthanize Shadow before his foster returned for him (date of return August 4<sup>th</sup>). Many of the volunteers on hand stepped up to ensure that Shadow was doing well, taking him to the yard for snuggles and toy play, and preparing veggies for him to eat. Shadow's food was left in the refrigerator for staff to use during his meals—they did not, and noted he was not eating his kibble. Shadow does not like plain kibble and will refuse to eat it, and as such, began to lose weight. Shelter management decided he wasn't eating, although several volunteers have videos of him face planting into bowls of veggies, and kibble with bone broth in it and eating it all up.

Dr. Britz recommended humane euthanasia on July 26 for Shadow (as we all feared would happen). One of the volunteers (who has a very full house already) stepped up and offered to foster Shadow for the last week of his original foster's vacation. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, the idea was broached with Dr. Britz and Donna Gillespie. Dr. Britz stated she liked this idea because someone could be monitoring him at all hours of the day to make sure his health wasn't declining further. Donna stated if it was okay with Jackie, it was okay with her. His foster immediately texted Jackie about the situation. The volunteers were then told that his foster must state that she wanted him to go to foster, which she did. Jackie gave a thumbs up emoticon in text, which everyone took as her approval. The temporary foster came to pick him up and was told no, he was NPO and going to vets the next morning (Monday, July 31). On Monday, since he was done at the vet, we asked if the foster could take him home and were told to ask the foster coordinator. Even though it was his day off, he responded to our texts affirmatively, although he was uncertain as to why his approval was needed, if Dr. Britz, Jackie, and Donna had all approved. Even with all of these approvals, we still weren't allowed to send Shadow home with a foster.

On Tuesday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, Shadow was euthanized. It was apparently a medical necessity, as he had almost fallen and had difficulty standing back up. The temporary foster, his foster, and a volunteer had been chatting at the time that this was happening at the shelter. An email stating that his foster was told ahead of time that he was being euthanized was sent out. This is an inaccurate statement, as a volunteer was in a conversation with his foster while this was happening. Shadow's foster caretaker texted the volunteer almost three hours after stating she had just found out. Shadow had less than three days to be at the shelter before his foster came to get him.

Shadow was a large dog, and had been moved to the intake kennels where there was air conditioning. He was unable to stand with all four paws on the ground, and instead, had to stand with his back paws on the kurunda bed while eating. This awkward positioning may have contributed to his weakened back hips/legs.

The volunteers were told that Jackie had been keeping Shadow in her office for his comfort. Friday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, at 1500 hrs. Shadow was already in his intake kennel and Jackie's car was not in the parking lot. The volunteer cannot attest to what time Jackie arrived at work, what time she grabbed the dog, and what time she left, if she came in at all (many of the management staff do not work Fridays). Saturday and Sunday (July 29-30), Shadow was kept in his very small intake kennel all day. Monday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, Shadow spent the day in the vet's office. At 1500, a volunteer assisted a vet tech in walking him back to his kennel in south. Other than on the day that he died, when exactly was Shadow "resting comfortably in Jackie's office?"

The shelter was overcapacity at the time of Shadow's "medical emergency."

**Dillan:** Dillan is a very timid dog who came into the shelter as a stray. It is very clear that he has suffered abuse and trauma in his past. Neither of the "behaviorists" on staff worked with him. Training, board and care, or rescue was never seriously considered. He was adopted and returned within 36 hours because the adopter stated, "his saliva made her skin itch." He was adopted again by a family. At night, he became afraid of the father, although during the day, he had no issues. He was returned again. He then went into foster care and was returned after a few days, because he had issues at night with the male foster (none during the day). After each of these returns, neither of the "behaviorists" on staff ever worked with him. Between his third and fourth adoption, he was under evaluation for a month. His fourth adopters are Dillan's angels. The female adopter and one of the volunteers are friends. They adopted Dillan, knowing his issues, and began to work with him. They identified several of

his triggers, including poor night vision and a fear of men walking through doors. They discovered a nightlight helped, and started working on the men/door issue. Unfortunately, after two weeks, there was a fight between Dillan and the other dog. The female adopter stated the fight was started by the other dog, and likely finished by Dillan. Fearing that the dogs were more injured than they turned out to be, and fearing that they were in over their heads with training a dog who was as traumatized as Dillan, they brought him to the shelter. They were strong supporters of VCAS, and had adopted multiple dogs from VCAS before. Familiar with the mission, they believed with the information they had provided, Dillan would get further training and/or sent to rescue. The shelter did not offer training assistance, vet bill assistance, or any other assistance that would assist the adopters. The female adopter begged the volunteer she knew not to let the shelter euthanize Dillan. The shelter decided to euthanize Dillan, citing his "lack of progress." Neither "behaviorist" on staff had yet to work with Dillan to track his "progress." The adopter had texted her volunteer friend previous to emailing Lucy, and cut and pasted a bulk of her emails to Lucy from her texts. The information in his euthanasia decision was greatly exaggerated, and paraphrased to inaccurately reflect the adopter's words. The adopters noted his improvements, but admitted they didn't know what route to take to further his improvement. When the adopters found out that the shelter intended to euthanize their dog, they reclaimed him. The shelter has yet to offer assistance with training, either by recommendation or financially. In fact, Donna told the adopter, "I hope you didn't do this because you felt guilty. If he ever comes back to the shelter, you know what will happen to him." With the help of the volunteers, Dillan's adopters have finally gotten in touch with a trainer, and Dillan has progressed leaps and bounds.

Neither of the "behaviorists" on staff worked with him. The assessment of Dillan was strictly based on what was written in his file (which was not a direct statement of what his adopters had said), and what could be observed standing outside his kennel. The shelter was over capacity at the time of his euthanasia notice and eventual rescue.

**Presley:** As of 08/29/23, Presley and his companion, Silvia Casas, have arrived in North Carolina, after driving from California to the Great Pyrenees Rescue of North Carolina. Presley is people selective (a characteristic of the breed), and the transport that the shelter hired was woefully underprepared. Presley had let the transporter know with some growls that he was frustrated, which the transporter ignored. Presley protested more aggressively. This led him to only be handled by four staff members; of those four staff members, only one could actually handle him as he did not like the other three. The one approved staff member who could handle him was on vacation. This big 150 pound dog was stuck in a tiny kennel for two weeks without getting out. Volunteers brought up that this treatment was inhumane, and he had a few volunteers who could still handle him to get him out, if approved. Slowly, the shelter approved more staff that the dog liked so that he was able to get out of his kennel. However, the improved situation was after two weeks of Presley being stuck in a small kennel with no playtime. One of his favorite staff members was going to take him home for the night to see how he did, but he decided he did not like her family.

A volunteer contacted another transport team on behalf of the shelter and put them in touch with the shelter. Following up, the volunteer learned nothing had been arranged. She asked if the cost was too high, as numerous people would donate to the cost of his transport and was told the shelter was moving in another direction.

The shelter looked into a rescue about three hours away. A trusted volunteer offered to transport Presley. The shelter never followed up, and the rescue did not work out.

Presley was pulled by a local rescue, and embarked on a road trip Friday, 08/25/23 to North Carolina (the rescue there never lost interest in him), with volunteer Silvia Casas. Silvia paid for the entire trip

out of pocket. The foundation had enough money to hire a transporter; why are they not covering Silvia's costs to transport Presley to rescue? A small group of other volunteers started a fundraiser to help cover her costs—something that, per Jackie, the foundation is supposed to do.

The shelter was overcapacity at the time of Presley's rescue. He was pulled before the euthanasia email was sent out, but it was not looking like a positive outcome for him.

**Joey:** Joey was born with unique genitalia, both male and female, as well as a tail that never fully developed. This medical condition was not fatal, although it would require special attention throughout Joey's life. Instead of finding a rescue or potential adopter who would take care of Joey, the shelter decided to euthanize Joey, a one year old baby, with a non-fatal condition. As is par for the course, the volunteers took over; contacted rescues, vets, and vet schools from UC Davis, to Asher House, from Dr. Evan Antin to a vet in England who was familiar with this condition, to save Joey's life. And, due to the tireless work of volunteers, an adopter (who has saved three other dogs from VCAS), came forward.

Jackie claims to have named Joey in an attempt to look like she bonded with the dog. It was a volunteer that suggested the name Joey to her, as the volunteer felt like Joey is a cute name for both a male and female. Jackie endorsed this idea, but she did not come up with it (the volunteer also felt pretty badly when Jackie announced to the world on a live stream video, "DUDE, I NAMED YOU!!")

The shelter was over capacity at the time of his rescue.

**Flash:** Flash passed away in his kennel overnight, unattended, after being over sedated and/or having a reaction to sedation. Flash was brought to vets' office to attend to some foxtails in his coat. He was sedated at 0800, and the vet's office "ran out of time" to attend to him. They brought him back in the next day and sedated him again. Flash was sent to his kennel to come out from under anesthesia, where no one from vet's office checked on him to see his progress. It was noticed by two volunteers, independent of each other, at 1800 as they were preparing to leave, that Flash could barely pick up his head, was slow to respond to his name, did not accept treats or even get out of bed for treats, and did not "awoooooooo-woooooo" a goodbye, as was his typical manner. The closing staff attendant noted that Flash was curled up on his bed as she walked by, which was typical of him once the shelter closed. The staff is instructed not to wake up the dogs once the shelter is closed so they can get good sleep (they close the dogs in at 1800, and arrive in the mornings at 0700—even if the staff did wake the dogs up between 1800 and 2100 before they leave, there is still plenty of time for the dogs to get a good night's sleep). Flash was found passed away in his kennel. The vets' office has reassured everyone that they have a great track record with sedation, but one dog passing away due to inaction by the vets' office is one too many. Animals recovering from surgery and/or sedation need to be checked on continuously—"well they walked back to their kennel" is not a good enough assessment of health. If Flash were human, his doctor would have been guilty of malpractice.

The shelter was over capacity at the time of his death.

**Freya:** Freya was a three year old who was cancer ridden and had burst masses in her anal passages. She was medically euthanized when this was discovered. However, Freya presented worsening symptoms for a month before the vet did a scan on the body to see what was happening. In this month, Freya suffered. She was unable to defecate without pain, and would screech with every attempt. In the week before her death, blood would flow from her rear as she screeched. Her kennel was covered in blood. She attempted to defecate while being shown to an adopter, and bled and screeched in front of a potential adopter. In fact, she was still up for adoption until the day she died. How much worse does an animal have to get before the vet's office takes action? One of the vet techs even approached one of the non-treating vets to ask THEM to take over Freya's case. While the shelter

is euthanizing dogs for fairly minor, trainable behavioral issues, this poor dog was left to suffer in pain for an entire month.

**Lupe:** Lupe came in as a stray. She was adopted and brought back after less than two days because the owners other dog was showing signs of toy aggression. The shelter did not offer financial assistance for training in order to keep Lupe in her home.

Lupe was the starter dog in playgroup. This position means that when bringing dogs into playgroup for the first time, she was the dog they'd test the new dogs with. She could play gently or rowdy, always was the first to greet other dogs, and never showed aggression.

Lupe was adopted on August 21 or 22. After a week, Lupe dug out of her yard. This is a common trait of huskies who are left outside to their own devices. About a block from her home, she encountered a Chihuahua being walked. The Chihuahuas owner decided it was a good idea to allow her dog to meet another dog who was unknown to them, off leash with no owner in sight. The initial meeting went fine, and somehow immediately escalated into the Chihuahua getting injured. Lupe was returned to the shelter on September 1, where she continued to show no aggression to other animals. The shelter did not offer to build a more secure fence for the yard so that he could keep her in their yard. Lupe was euthanized September 6 for "offensive aggression." The fact that Lupe had been in the shelter for approximately five months and was the starter dog and play group never showing aggression previously eluded euthanasia board. In the past animals have been muzzled and put into a yard with a small dog to gauge their behavior. Lupe was not. No behavioral list looked at her. There was no discussion on how he previously non-aggressive dog turned into Kujo and then immediately flip another switch into being a non-aggressive dog. No consideration was given to the fact that her behavior may have been defensive instead of offensive. Chihuahuas are known to start things that they can't finish due to their small dog complexes, and

The multiple killings of dogs for behavioral reasons that could be addressed by a behaviorist, were the shelter to have one of those on the team, had caused numerous dedicated volunteers to cut down the hours spent at the shelter, and the amount of days they come in. Many have begun looking into volunteering at one of several or the rescues nearby.

**Kittens:** If bottle baby kittens are brought to the shelter and there is no foster, the kittens are euthanized. This is because they need to eat every two hours. The shelter employs someone "on-call" overnight, but that person is not at the shelter. They are being paid not come in unless it's an "emergency." If the shelter is paying someone to be on call overnight, and come in for emergencies, why are there kittens being killed on a regular basis? This employee can come in and feed the kittens, as well as check on any other medical issue animals at the shelter. After all, they are already being paid for their time—they might as well work (as opposed to killing kittens).

**STRAY CAT SITUATION:** Jackie Rose has presented stating there are very few stray cats, as most cats are community animals or feral anyways. Shelter employees are told not to help people who call cats or bring in stray cats, as much as Jackie would like to deny this happens. A volunteer was out on a walk, and a very thin, very dirty cat came running up to her. As someone who has been working with animals for over ten years, this volunteer recognized this as a lost pet. She knew that there was no way she could carry the animal back to her car, as she was over a mile to from her house, and had to cross busy roads to get back (it was her intention to take the cat to her vet to see if there was a microchip). Instead, she called the shelter for assistance, and did not identify as a volunteer. She was told this was a community cat, and to ignore it. The volunteer asked if someone could at least come with a microchip scanner to see if it was an owned cat; she would do the rest. She was told no, the

shelter does not assist with things like that, and hung up on. She attempted to carry the cat down the path, and the cat did not want to be held. She took photos and shared with Camarillo Lost Pets on Facebook. Within two minutes, the moderator contacted her and said, “That’s Simba! He’s been missing for over a month! Where are you? I’m sending the owner your way.” By the time the owner had arrived, Simba had run into the bushes and was scared to come back out. A trapper was called, and assisted getting Simba home. The shelter mentions in its mission statement that one of its primary goals is to reunite owners with their lost pets. If this was the case, why did it take a Facebook Group, a volunteer, and a trapper to reunite this cat and his owner—while the shelter stated they don’t “do that.?”

**STAFFING ISSUES:** There are several very hard working people on staff at VCAS who deserve endless amounts of praise and recognition from management. Two of their most senior staff have already left the shelter, including the irreplaceable Laura Richmond. There was a position with promotion potential that was filled by the kennel manager’s girlfriend. That’s correct—the staff member who is dating her boss got a promotion. This person is very good at exactly two things: following her boss/girlfriend around, and hiding from everyone so as to not work. Hard workers are leaving VCAS for better positions, while the boss’ girlfriend gets a promotion for being the boss’ girlfriend.

We have two so-called behaviorists on staff. We are not sure what their job functions entail, but they rarely, if ever, are working with the dogs on their behavioral issues. Both are known to remain in their offices. One typically has her own dogs in the office with her. If they are too busy to work as behaviorists, a position strictly meant to work with the animals on their behavior is necessary.

**VOLUNTEER ISSUES:** It has become increasingly more difficult for volunteers, who are pouring their heart and soul into these dogs for the price of their free time, to find the desire/motivation to come in with so many dogs being euthanized for space. Shelter management states they don’t euthanize for space, but as noted above, there are many innocuous reasons given for the killing of dogs when the shelter is full. This accounts for the drop in volunteer hours as much as the pandemic does at this point.

Please consider this request for assistance.

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