READ AND CONSIDERED
DATE 9/11 BY

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: *Animal Services in Sonoma County: Separate and Not Equal*

Report Date: June 12, 2025

Response by: Mark Scott Title: Executive Director

Agency/Department Name: North Bay Animal Services

FINDINGS:

[List numbers: ie. F1, F2]

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: ___F3, F4, F8, F10, F13_____

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F5, F6, F7, F9, F11, F12

Four page statement attached with explanation

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons.)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

[List numbers: ie. R2, R3]

- Recommendations numbered: ____R7, R8_____ have been implemented.
  (Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered: ____R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6_____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
  (Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered: _____ require(s) further analysis.
  (Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. ***This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.)***
- Recommendations numbered: _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
  (Attach an explanation.)

Date: September 10, 2025 Signed:

Number of pages attached: 4

(See attached PC Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)

NORTH BAY
ANIMAL SERVICES

COMPASSION • COMMUNITY • CONNECTION

North Bay Animal Services
Response to 2024-2025 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury Report
Report Title: Animal Services in Sonoma County: Separate and Not Equal
Report Date: September 10, 2025
Respondent: Mark Scott, Executive Director
Agency: North Bay Animal Services (NBAS)

This response reflects NBAS's commitment to animal welfare, transparent governance, public collaboration, and the compassionate care of Sonoma County's most vulnerable animals.

In Summary:

- **We support a fully funded, countywide task force for shelter collaboration.**
- **We support a centralized licensing system with revenue sharing.**
- **We support no-cost, accessible veterinary services for underserved communities.**
- **We support investment in additional NBAS roles to support growth.**
- **We request the public and partner cities consider the full context of our work before forming judgments based on incomplete understanding.**

Additional Context and Clarification:

Grand Jury Assumptions and statement of facts: Some of the Grand Jury's statements are opinions or observations and not based in fact. There were no opportunities for in-depth follow-up or clarifications.

Resource Management: Despite flat contract funding since 2012, NBAS has expanded services significantly. We operate 7 days a week (9–6) as well as on call 24 hours a day, offer in-house veterinary care 5 days a week, and maintain a public pet pantry. Our lean organizational structure consolidates administrative tasks and improves service delivery.

Public Services Expansion: NBAS offers more than required—routine care, emergency response, low-cost procedures, provide support to members of the Petaluma SAFE Team, boarding for community members' pets in unexpected health situations, and free food/supply support.

Collaboration: NBAS handles bite investigations, emergency calls, and stray pickups for non-contract cities at no cost. We also intake at-risk animals from high-volume shelters across the state.

Veterinary Access Crisis: Post-COVID, elective surgeries were halted and the veterinary workforce declined sharply. Costs soared. Today, even full-cost vet services are hard to obtain. Rabies clinics and spay/neuter capacity are severely constrained—not by our will, but by market conditions.

Volunteer and Privacy Standards: Volunteer involvement is limited by law. Certain functions—handling fines, managing client data, website maintenance—are reserved for staff to protect client privacy and comply with labor regulations.

Data Interpretation Issues: Licensing lapses were due to transitions between contractors, COVID-related constraints, and economic challenges. NBAS issued grace periods and continued outreach. Bite reports are filed when investigation protocols require it.

Facility Use and Cleanliness: Our shelter uses all available indoor space for animal care and has expanded outdoor play yards. Urine odor and open food during public hours reflect cleaning and feeding times—not neglect. We are proud to be the only county shelter open daily to the public.

Shelter Industry Context: Shelter operations have evolved rapidly, while legal codes have not. The Grand Jury's outdated metrics fail to reflect lifesaving models or foster-to-adopt best practices. Our Board, while grassroots, is evolving with new recruitment strategies and stronger oversight goals.

FINDINGS

F1. Disagree Partially. NBAS agrees that fragmentation exists among animal services agencies in the county. We support a coordinated effort to improve collaboration, standardization, and communication. At the same time NBAS has always stepped up when asked by our county partners and do not need a formal process to continue to do so.

F2. Disagree Partially. While we acknowledge resource limitations and opportunities for improvement, we dispute the characterization that NBAS is broadly non-compliant. Many cited issues reflect shared municipal responsibilities or broader systemic challenges, such as veterinary shortages and facility funding. Since assuming our contracts in 2018, NBAS has worked within flat funding levels that have not increased since 2012, while simultaneously expanding services beyond contract obligations. Our foster-to-adopt process follows industry best practices during a national veterinary shortage.

F3. Agree. NBAS supports participation in a coordinated countywide disaster response and welcomes inclusion in the official disaster annex and MOUs. We routinely back up SCAS during emergencies and serve uncontracted cities like Cotati and Rohnert Park informally at no cost.

F4. Agree. Staffing and funding limitations are real concerns countywide. We have historically adapted through a flat organizational structure, streamlined processes, and consolidated administrative functions while taking on additional contracts.

F5. Disagree Partially. Maintaining websites and digital systems has been challenging due to limited administrative staff. However, we've prioritized direct services over online communication, since most clients engage with us via phone or in-person.

F6. Disagree Partially. We support a countywide, outsourced licensing system. However, the community is accustomed to different pay structures based on city code. For example, business licenses vary by city and are not uniform.

F7. Disagree Partially. Improving licensing rates and rabies compliance are mutual goals. However, context matters: following the COVID-19 pandemic, many owners were unable to obtain rabies vaccinations due to vet shortages. NBAS allowed multiple grace periods and deprioritized licensing in favor of medical and housing services. NBAS has free microchip clinics monthly to assist owners in recovering their lost pets.

F8. Agree. A shared licensing vendor would help all agencies improve compliance.

F9. Disagree Partially. While staff limitations have delayed renewal notices, NBAS has maintained access to licensing via our website and in-person assistance. Postage and printing costs have increased, but license fees have not. With no rabies outbreaks, we have focused resources elsewhere.

F10. Agree. Centralized training would benefit all agencies. NBAS supports the creation of shared educational resources and professional development for staff.

F11. Disagree Partially. Some issues noted are factual; others lack context. For example, reported "bite calls" often involve no dog present upon arrival, rendering a bite report unnecessary. All relevant laws are followed. Veterinary shortages have impacted our ability to schedule timely sterilizations, not our commitment to them. Staffing bios may not include certifications, but all staff are trained and supervised. Our facility is clean, organized, and adapted beyond its original capacity.

F12. Disagree Partially. While we acknowledge some response lags, we maintain 24/7 call monitoring and rapid deployment within our scope. Service to non-contract cities stretches our capacity further.

F13. Agree. The Petaluma shelter facility has deferred maintenance. The City has made several recent improvements. We continue to collaborate on safety and usability enhancements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. Will be implemented. NBAS supports the formation of a new Animal Services Task Force and will participate in good faith. We recommend this task force include funding for participation, as NBAS staff all carry direct care responsibilities.

R2. Not applicable to NBAS directly, but we support city participation.

R3. Will be implemented. NBAS will actively collaborate.

R4. Will be implemented. NBAS will assist with public education and licensing awareness, within our operational limits.

R5. Will be implemented. We invite contracting cities to evaluate our facility and services. NBAS has always welcomed transparency and oversight.

R6. Will be implemented. A quarterly reporting template is in development and will include licensing, call data, and animal outcomes.

R7. Not under NBAS jurisdiction, but we support the recommendation and are cooperating with City staff.

R8. Not under NBAS jurisdiction, but we support improvements to the facility.

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