

June 8, 2009

Commissioner Randy Leonard  
City of Portland  
1221 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., Room 210  
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Commissioner Leonard:

We have been following the progression of the Animal Services Taskforce with interest since it was adopted in May of last year. We applaud you and Mr. Ted Wheeler for your leadership, and the Taskforce for its dedication and diligence in addressing a most challenging topic – sustainable animal services for all of Multnomah County, including the City of Portland.

A viable animal services program is necessary and important for any city, but especially for one the size of Portland, and we are waiting to learn what the Implementation Team will present to both the City Council and the Board of Commissioners. However, one idea raised during the February 11, 2009 City Council meeting while discussing pet licensure compliance has us seriously concerned – that “veterinarians should not be able to treat an unlicensed pet.”

The Oregon Veterinary Medical Association is a statewide nonprofit professional organization, representing more than 200 members in Multnomah County. We do not support prohibiting veterinarians from treating unlicensed animals for the following reasons:

1. As veterinarians we are ethically bound to use our scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and the relief of animal suffering. This suggestion, if adopted, would require veterinarians to breach their medical ethics; we cannot compromise the Veterinarian’s Oath.
2. Refusing to see a patient because it is unlicensed is wrong and would violate the basic trust between the veterinarian and the client, which is the foundation for the animal’s care. Animals are brought to veterinarians for a variety of reasons – for a general physical examination, for routine vaccinations, because of illness or disease, as well as for emergency treatment. Even the basic examination is an important and vital part of a patient’s care, as it provides veterinarians with the opportunity to detect and prevent diseases, as well as to provide vaccinations that help protect the public health.
3. When a client brings his or her pet to the veterinarian, the practitioner has the opportunity to educate the owner about the value and importance of pet licensure. Requiring a veterinarian to not treat an unlicensed pet is counterproductive to establishing a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship and a potential barrier to that animal’s care. Such a law may also be an incentive for owners to seek veterinary services outside of Multnomah County, or worse, not treat the animal at all, thereby endangering its health as well as public health.
4. As you know from your participation on the task force, caring for animals and providing essential public services is a daunting and complex task. To successfully

accomplish this requires the participation and cooperation of animal owners, the general citizenry at large, humane organizations, city and county agencies, *and* veterinarians. However, expecting a veterinarian to withhold medical care from a patient because of concerns over licensure is likely to create unnecessary tension and divisiveness between practitioners and animal control services, at a time when we believe it is more important for these two communities to work together.

Commissioner Leonard, thank you for hearing our concerns. I hope that my letter gives you a broader perspective as to why we cannot support this concept and believe it may do more harm than good for animals in the community. On behalf of veterinarians in Multnomah County, I also ask that you reconsider the suggestion that veterinarians be required to not treat unlicensed pets.

If you would like to share your thoughts on the subject, or if I can clarify my comments or answer any questions that you might have, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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President

Hoffman Veterinary Clinic / Salem  
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- c. County Commissioner Ted Wheeler, Co-Chair Animal Services Taskforce  
Animal Services Taskforce Members