

February 25, 2016

Auditor Steve March  
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600  
Portland, OR 97206

Dear Auditor March:

Please accept this letter as Management's response to the Animal Service Audit conducted by your office during the summer/fall of 2015. Thank you for the in-depth review and analysis conducted by you and your staff. The information presented in the report will be very helpful in guiding MCAS as we continue to evaluate our services and make the necessary changes to enhance our programming and operations. We are in agreement with the recommendations and desire to implement many of these modifications. However, as indicated in your report, additional resources will be critical to the success of these efforts.

In an effort to succinctly respond to the report, we will present a brief overview of the recent progress made by MCAS and will then address the stated recommendations. Again, please note that we fully agree with the need for the stated improvements and have been working the past several months on developing ways to move these issues forward.

### **Recent Progress/Program Enhancements**

As history is our greatest teacher, it is important for us to acknowledge the progress that has been made by MCAS the past several years and strategically build upon these changes in the years to come. The past three (3) to five (5) years have been monumental for MCAS. During this time period, MCAS has made great strides and has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to enhancing its services and to be innovative and responsive to the needs of the community. This is evidenced by the significant increase in the Live Release Rate for animals served between 2007 and 2014 (Cats: 36% FY 2007 to 87% FY 2014 & Dogs: 70% FY 2007 to 94% FY2014). This level of improvement could not have been accomplished without a strong dedication to exploring programming options and a willingness to "take a risk" to try something new. One example of the many facets that contribute to the increased Live Release Rate is the dog and cat volunteer foster care programs. The program consists of a large network of volunteer homes that under our direction provide 24/7 care for animals in preparation for adoption into their forever homes.

MCAS has experienced many changes the past several years and has consistently sought to implement creative and innovative programming to better serve the community. Nonetheless, while these changes have been successful, they have been extremely demanding upon "the system" (daily operations) and have placed additional stress upon the staff to sustain these efforts. It is this factor that seems to underlie many of the recommendations made in the report.

## **Response to Recommendations**

### 1. To Improve Record Keeping and Data Quality

We are in complete agreement with the premise that record keeping and data management are critically important components to the successful operation of MCAS. Unfortunately, for the past many years MCAS has been operating with a data management and program operations system (known as Multiple Options) that has been sorely inadequate and has not met the needs of the division. This system has drastically limited MCAS in its ability to accurately collect and analyze data, maintain animal records in an organized and comprehensive manner, and facilitate/construct mechanisms to decrease user error. As a result of these deficiencies, an RFP was recently released by the County for the replacement of this system. We are currently in the proposal review and assessment phase and anticipate selecting a new software system and vendor within the next few weeks. The anticipated date for implementation of the new system is June 2016.

### 2. To Better Protect the Health and Safety of Animals in the Shelter

The protection of the animals we serve is of utmost importance to all involved with MCAS and is the heart and soul of our mission. Accordingly, we are committed to ensuring that all animals receive the highest quality care. While MCAS has made great strides in the areas of daily care (feeding, cleaning, and sanitation) and veterinary services, we recognize that we are deficient in the provision of comprehensive behavioral assessments and enrichment services. In an attempt to address this area, MCAS has initiated various short-term efforts designed to address these concerns. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have not yielded sustainable outcomes. It is this area that is most critical to the success of MCAS and the animals we serve. As such, we will continue to explore funding options to support these efforts and will seek to provide additional training and supportive consultation to staff to increase their skills and knowledge in this area.

### 3. Better Protect the Health and Safety of People

Equal to the health and safety of the animals is the health and safety of the people associated with MCAS (staff, volunteers and the public) and we are dedicated to making improvements in these areas. However, it must be clearly stated that they actually are several distinct issues.

First, in regards to workplace safety, we will work closely with Risk Management to develop and implement a comprehensive training plan designed to address the common types of potential workplace issues that confront our staff and volunteers. This will be an ongoing strategy with adjustments/modifications made as needed.

Second, in regards to the safety associated with adopters and potential adopters, staff will be trained and documentation will be monitored by supervisors to ensure that all potential known or suspected safety issues are clearly expressed to all potential adopters and that such communications are explicitly documented in the animal's record. Additional training/supervision will be provided as needed.

Third, in regards to the issues concerning workplace culture and professional behavior, this issue has already been elevated to the new Division Director, Jackie Rose and her management team. Accordingly, they are currently developing various mechanisms to address these concerns. In early December, all staff participated in an MCAS-specific employee survey designed to target issues related to workplace culture and interpersonal behaviors. The results of the survey indicated there were several underlying issues affecting the staff's morale and behavior. In an effort to address these issues multiple events have been held to address these concerns and staff have responded positively to these events. Additionally, daily activities such as supervision and coaching, staff meetings, staff trainings and role modeling have been emphasized by management and have resulted in staff expressing positive feelings and improved behaviors. Lastly, all staff have been informed that any/all unprofessional behavior will result in discipline and such behavior will not be tolerated. These issues will continue to be addressed with staff with the goal being the improvement of staff morale and attitude.

#### 4. Improve Planning and Measurement

This recommendation is extremely timely, as MCAS is currently in the process of evaluating the efficiencies of daily activities, the effectiveness of services, and the methods in which we collect and review this data. Further, with the implementation of the new software system discussed above, the ability to capture data and complete thoughtful analysis will be something that can be accomplished fairly easily by the management team without having to rely on multiple internal county systems to assist with these efforts. We are extremely dedicated to ensuring that all processes, effectively and efficiently, support the mission of MCAS and look forward to having the ability to utilize accurate and manageable data to help us plan for the future.

In closing, we greatly appreciate the insights presented by the Audit Team and applaud your use of the ASV Guidelines to help assess our services. I look forward to the leadership of Ms. Rose as part of the DCS/MCAS team to help move the agency forward to address the identified areas of concern and am confident that we will be able to make the necessary modifications needed to enhance our services.

Sincerely,



Kim E. Peoples  
Director

