

Friday, July 4, 2008

Mr. Warren Patitz  
Chairman IACC Advisory Board

Dear Mr. Patitz,

I am writing to you as the Chairman of the IACC advisory board out of frustration and disgust with conditions and actions observed at IACC in the past two weeks. While Administrator Talley has been very open and accommodating, I am skeptical that he will be effective in addressing the concerns outlined below, as they are so obvious that anyone who enters the facility can see them, and know they are in desperate need of remedy...and the conditions persist there.

A group of friends and I have been volunteering at IACC for the past two weeks. We specifically wanted to make a real impact on the care of the animals, and have gone the past two Tuesdays to clean the Receiving Room. On our first visit, the Receiving Room was in very poor shape. The smell was overpowering and the room was teeming with flies.

It became obvious that cleaning would be difficult as they lacked all but the most crude and simple cleaning implements. The cleaning buckets they provided were filled with water and a splash (about 1-2 ounces) of diluted cleaning solution from a spray bottle. We were eventually provided with 2 other spray bottles that contained a colorless liquid with a citrus scent. The volunteer coordinator commented to the kennel manager that he wasn't sure what it was, and "smells like "Lemon Pledge". As a group of individuals that has been involved in high-volume spay/neuter of cats since 2002, we are very familiar with the processes and materials needed for sanitation of a volume animal environment.

When animals are kept in very confined quarters, sanitation becomes critical to prevent them from contaminating their food and water with vomit, urine and feces, and also then contaminating the cage environment thoroughly, making it harder to clean later. The poor sanitation increases disease spread potential, and also increases animal stress, increasing susceptibility to disease. The smaller the cage, the more frequent and thorough the sanitation needs to be.

We dumped and chose not to use the diluted buckets, and dumped the scented colorless liquid and refilled the spray bottles after calculating the proper mixing ratio of concentrated cleaner in a 55-gallon drum of Vetenall in the Receiving Room. During the cleaning process, we observed that a number of cages did not appear to have been cleaned within the past day and likely longer. Some of the small litterboxes were completely full of feces and urine. Numerous food and water bowls were empty or contaminated. Several cats had dry kibble that had become moldy. Several fearful cats were cowering behind their litterboxes, even though donated plastic shelves which would've provided them some measure of cover and comfort were stacked outside the Receiving Room door.

We found one kitten that was obviously debilitated in the hindquarters. A superficial examination by one of our volunteers who is a veterinary technician suggested that there were one more more fractures. The rear end of the kitten was covered with diarrhea, urine and an infestation of maggots. We contacted 3 staff members immediately. The first staff member's reaction was to inform us that it was an "investigation" kitten (which was not correct, according to the cage card). The second staff member

looked with concern, then left. A third staff member looked with concern, then left. Eventually, an animal control officer who was just passing through took the kitten away, presumably to be euthanized. According to the intake date, the kitten had laid there suffering for 2 days without anyone noticing the smell or the maggots. It also became obvious from that, and the general condition of the cages that the “investigation” animals are not considered to be worthy of the same care as the other animals.

Another aged cat that was marked for owner requested euthanasia was also debilitated, and suffering, unable to really move, eat or eliminate. When it was brought to the attention of a staff member, she commented that an officer had brought it in and put it in there, rather than euthanizing the cat themselves. And apparently the cat was then just forgotten. Fortunately, that cat was brought in earlier that day, so had not suffered in the facility as long.

On our return this past Tuesday, we brought approximately 10 spray bottles, a large wash tub and detergent so that gross soil could be removed from bowls and litter pans prior to sanitizing in bleach solution to make the cleaning process not only possible, but easier. We brought scrub brushes, rags, 2 rolling trash cans and trash bags – all the things that would be necessary for the room to be readily cleaned properly. We left the items there as a donation. The monetary cost of the items was trivial, but the need for them was obvious. We cannot understand why nobody had ever considered them necessary (and missing) until we arrived.

The Receiving Room was much cleaner on our second visit, although there were still litterboxes of cats that did not appear to have been cleaned since animals arrived on the previous Saturday (4 days). While cleaning, a few of us were alarmed by the cries of a dog in the hallway. We looked out the open door into the hallway to see a group of 3 people dragging a dog using some kind of pole device with a noose around the dog's neck. Since Receiving Room is next door to euthanasia, it was certain that the dog was headed to euthanasia. The dog was thrashing, barking and crying and was panicked such that he/she trailed urine and feces down the hallway.

According to nationally noted humane expert, Nathan Winograd:

*“Control poles are designed as a defensive or protective safety tool. They are not intended, and should not be used, as a matter of routine, convenience, speed, and for employees who “fear” the animals with no objective basis for doing so. The repeated use of control poles cannot be a substitute for professional animal handling, restraint and transport skills. Although staff safety is a priority, so is the humane handling of animals, neither of which is exclusive of the other. An animal handler's most important tool cannot be found in any catalog. By far, the greatest asset to animal handling staff is knowledge. Personnel trained in animal behavior and humane handling can ensure that they are handling animals-and employing equipment-in the safest, most humane manner.”*

Upon later discussion, Administrator Talley told us that if we ever saw an employee dragging an animal, to give him a description and he would deal with it, although he did not ask for a description in this case. Although I believe him to be a genuine, kind and honest man, I also believe that all who work in the building must be aware of this kind of mistreatment and choose to ignore. Since 3 people (presumably employees) were dragging and wrangling the dog, I can only conclude that this is a normal and accepted practice, and not the isolated work of an individual.

I requested and received from Mr. Talley a copy of the IACC “SOP” document, which corroborates the statement by Kirsten Vantwoud, kennel manager, when asked about euthanasia protocols at an IACC board meeting – that employees are encouraged to give available sedative drug(s) to animals prior to euthanasia. I have no reason to believe that the animal we saw was adequately sedated (if at all), as he/she was in abject terror while being dragged by the neck, off to his/her death literally kicking and screaming.

Our time there has shown us many things that are totally abhorrent and unacceptable. Even more so in the municipal shelter of the state's capital city. Every animal in the city's care should receive every possible measure of calm and dignity during their time UNDER THE CITY'S TAXPAYER-FUNDED CARE.

When a new volunteer signs up for IACC he/she must agree to follow a “VOLUNTEERS' CODE OF CONDUCT”. Item # 1 states:

*Never strike an animal, or handle an animal in such a way that it would be construed as rough or abusive. Always exercise compassion and care with all animals.*

Although I have yet to review all 150 pages of the IACC SOP, I would hope there is a similar requirement that applies to employees. But again, even if there is, it is not being observed.

Unfortunately, I suspect that in writing this letter, I will also no longer be welcome as a volunteer, as item #2 in the same Code of Conduct prohibits me from speaking of anything I see, read or hear about clients, staff or animals within the facility. It also prohibits me from taking any pictures. This type of forced non-disclosure is a breeding ground for actions (and inactions) that would not withstand scrutiny, like mistreating animals.

Regardless, if we as casual observers could readily see these problems, so could every member of staff or management, if they choose to simply look. I can only conclude that they do not understand what they are seeing, or do not care. Nobody would accept these conditions or any excuses for these conditions in a privately run facility. Indeed, an Animal Control Officer called to investigate conditions such as what we saw would almost certainly find them to be in violation of the city's own ordinances, and possibly state law.

Whether the problem is improper training or inadequate oversight I cannot say, but I can say there is an obvious problem there. The division takes great pains to ensure that there is no transparency, and that their operations cannot be readily observed or documented. This makes ensuring that deficiencies are corrected impractical under the current circumstances. As such, I believe the following measures need to be taken immediately:

- 1 There must be a ZERO TOLERANCE policy for mistreatment of any animal by IACC staff or volunteers. The definition of *mistreatment* should be broad enough to include anything that does not minimize discomfort or suffering of an animal. Whether mistreatment is intentional or the result of improper training or ignorance should not be relevant;

- 2 The facility should be put on a probationary period with active, external oversight by a team that is free to move about the facility, inspecting and observing until IACC demonstrates a pattern of compliance with state and local laws, their own policies and with basic humane care and treatment standards of the animals charged to their care;
- 3 All IACC policies need to be subject to a full independent review to ensure they promote humane ideals and compassionate care of the animals charged to their care;
- 4 IACC should adopt the fundamentals of the Companion Animal Protection Act (CAPA) to provide comprehensive protection of the animals charged to their care;
- 5 There should be complete transparency to the public throughout the facility (with appropriate safety measures), excluding private areas like bathrooms;
- 6 The observations and results from all oversight must be made publicly available and reported directly to the Mayor, Public Safety Director and City-County Council on an ongoing basis until the facility is operating by humane standards, in compliance with a reviewed/revised set of SOP's that ensure proper treatment of the animals charged to their care;
- 7 IACC should adopt No Kill philosophy and the No Kill Equation (as put forth by Nathan Winograd) as the operating model for IACC. A facility that adheres to the No Kill Equation by its very nature is not subject to the observed systemic problems of neglect and mistreatment of animals in their charge, as has been observed at IACC.

The facility cannot be permitted to continue to operate in a way that accepts turning a blind eye to the mistreatment of animals for any reason, and under any circumstances. The taxpayers of Marion County expect their tax money to be used wisely and in a manner consistent with their own moral and ethical beliefs, as reflected by the values of the leaders they elect. I am certain that what is happening at IACC does not reflect the values of the taxpayers of Marion County, or of the leaders, and as such needs to be stopped immediately.

We are a group of individuals committed to seeing that animals consigned to the care of Indianapolis are not mistreated. We are adamant in pursuing any and all options available to us to expedite remedy of these grievous conditions for the sake of immediately ending the suffering of animals.

Sincerely,

Greg Brush  
C.E.O., Feral Bureau of Indiana, Inc.

Maureen Owen, LVT  
President, Feral Bureau of Indiana, Inc.

Jill Wise, LVT

Carmalita Griffin

Kathleen Egan