



**Testimony of
Risa Weinstock, Executive Director
Animal Care & Control of NYC**

Before the

New York City Council Committee on Health

**Hearing on
Oversight: Animal Care & Control of NYC /Recent Progress and Opportunities
for Improvement in the NYC Animal Shelter System
and
Int. No. 485 – In relation to animal shelters**

February 25, 2015
10:00 a.m.
250 Broadway, 14th Floor
New York, NY

Good morning Chairman Johnson and members of the Health Committee. My name is Risa Weinstock and I am the Executive Director and General Counsel of Animal Care & Control of NYC (AC&C). Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's oversight hearing concerning AC&C's recent progress and opportunities for improvement in the NYC animal shelter system.

AC&C has made marked progress over the last several years as a result of City Council's passage of Local Law 59 in 2011. I would like to thank the Council for its support of AC&C and the significant increase in our funding that was made possible by that law. In FY2011 AC&C's budget was \$7.1 million and over the course of the last four years it has increased to more than \$13 million in contract funding from the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). The additional funding enabled AC&C to make necessary improvements to its operations, restore and expand services, increase staff, add new positions and departments, replace equipment and supplies with better products, and devote more resources and staff to the animals in our care. All of these enhancements have helped AC&C increase live outcomes of NYC's shelter animals; attract quality candidates for employment; attract more charitable contributions and funding for capital improvements; and overall become a better organization.

Background and Overview of AC&C

AC&C is the largest animal sheltering system in the northeastern United States¹. Our mission is to promote and protect the health, safety and welfare of pets and people in New York City. AC&C is unique among all other animal welfare organizations in NYC in that we are the **only** organization that accepts **every** animal brought to it, whether the animal has been abandoned, surrendered, found as a stray, brought in by the public, NYPD, or our field rescue team, and regardless of age, health status, breed, species or condition. As the only "open admission" animal sheltering organization in NYC our annual intake exceeds that of any limited admission facility or other shelter in all five boroughs. In calendar year 2014, AC&C took in over 35,000² animals -- including more than 30,000 cats and dogs -- or roughly 95 animals per day.

Established in 1995 and incorporated in NY State as a 501(c)(3) not for profit organization, AC&C has been dedicated to rescuing, caring for and finding loving homes for these homeless and abandoned animals for twenty years. Under a contract with the City of NY and DOHMH, we operate five facilities, one in each borough. Of these 5 locations, three (3) are full-service Animal Care Centers located in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, and two (2) are Receiving Centers, located in the Bronx and in Queens. We are the only organization that receives, *and accepts*, animals of all kinds at each of these locations, not just dogs, cats and rabbits, but also snakes, birds, reptiles, and various farm animals.

¹ ACCT Philadelphia reported intake of 27,990 animals in 2014. <http://www.acctphilly.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2014-Year-End.pdf?936bb7>

² Statistics available at www.nycacc.org/statistics.htm

In addition to sheltering animals, AC&C provides a multitude of services to people and animals in NYC including: counseling individuals upon intake, with the hope of offering safe, viable alternatives to surrendering a pet to the shelter; providing medical services upon intake and when an animal leaves the shelter (including examination, treatment, vaccination, spay/neuter, licensing and micro-chipping); providing daily behavior enrichment, and seeking placement for animals with the support of foster volunteers, New Hope partners (rescue organizations), returning animals to owners through lost and found efforts, and adoptions directly to the public. With the assistance of our Call Center, AC&C field services pick-up stray dogs, respond to emergency calls, transport animals from the receiving centers to the full service care centers several times per day, transport animals that have placement or require special medical attention beyond AC&C's resources, and respond to calls from the public needing assistance with an animal or concerning animals in need/distress.

AC&C receives tremendous support from the private sector as well. We are truly grateful, everyday, for the exceptional generosity of our dedicated volunteers, donors and partners. As a 501(c) (3) organization we are able to establish partnerships and solicit private donations and grants to provide animal enrichment, medical care and placement beyond the services articulated under the contract with the City. In 2014, financial contributions exceeded \$1.5 million. This figure is in addition to the tremendous support received in in-kind donations of goods and services. AC&C could not achieve the results we are seeing today without the breadth of public and private support. We are committed to continue on this trajectory of progress, which is essential to further grow both public and private support to enhance our efforts and ability to drive up the live release rate of the animals in our care.

Progress Report

Recruitment and Hiring

Since the passage of Local Law 59, AC&C has added almost 100 new staff; we have grown from 139 full time employees in January 2011 to over 230 currently. This increase in staffing remains essential in order to provide a higher level of care for the animals and services throughout the City. Staff has been added throughout the organization, across all departments and locations. Additionally, new departments were created, such as the admissions department to focus on surrender prevention, and enhance the information we received about an animal at intake ; an adoption department with staff exclusively dedicated to work on placing animals through public adoptions; a robust behavior and enrichment department that has tripled in size; dedicated client services staff and management; and seasoned development and communications professionals. Prior to these improvements, every transaction began at a front counter, regardless of why a member of the public was coming to AC&C. We plan to continue to grow our staff through FY2018 to increase the human to animal ratio especially during the spring and summer months when our intakes can swell to 2,000 animals per month. We will also add full time Admissions Counselors to the Bronx and Queens receiving centers; adoption staff dedicated to offsite, mobile adoption events to reflect the addition of four mobile adoption centers over the next years; and additional development and communications staff to focus on support from foundations, corporations and brand marketing to drive adoptions.

Hours of Operation

The increases in hours of operation as set out in Local Law 59 were met on or before the legal requirement. In brief our hours are:

Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island Care Centers: 8AM - 8PM, 7 days a week

- Adoptions: Monday through Friday: 12:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Intakes: 8am – 8pm, 7 days a week, plus the Manhattan Care Center is open to the public and NYPD 24/7 for intakes
- Admissions: 8AM - 8PM, 7 days a week (Manhattan and Brooklyn); 11am-7pm, Saturday-Wednesday (Staten Island); FY2016 goal: 8AM - 8PM, 7 days a week for all care centers and receiving centers
- Field Services: 8AM - 8PM, 7 days a week; 24/7 for emergencies
- Call Center: 8AM - 8PM, 7 days a week
- Bronx and Queens Receiving Centers: 8AM - 8PM, 7 days a week

Animal Intakes

In calendar year 2014, AC&C took in over 35,000³ animals. Of this number, 30,118 were cats and dogs, compared to 28,907 cats and dogs in the previous year. In response to the upward trend of pet surrender, we created an Admissions Department in June 2014. We now offer surrender prevention counseling, strategies and resources to help an individual keep their pet. In just six months, we were able to prevent 367 dogs and cats from entering the shelter system. We will build on this success by adding staff and growing the network of resources we can offer, with a goal of preventing at least another 700 animals from being surrendered this year.

Animal Outcomes

AC&C is often asked “how many days do you keep an animal before euthanasia?” There is no pre-specified time period we keep animals prior to euthanasia. There is however a legal mandate regarding the length of time an animal must remain unavailable for placement, to the public or rescue community. AC&C will hold animals as long as possible based on a multitude of factors, including placement options, the animal’s health and behavior, observations from staff and volunteers and, vital information obtained from the previous caregiver, as well as the resources of the Care Center at the given time.. Throughout the time animals are with us, we are working on placement plans and options. Indeed we currently have several cats and dogs just waiting for someone to adopt them, and have been in our care more than a month, and even longer. It is our goal to find placement for every animal that is healthy or may have a treatable condition through continual improvement and assessment of programmatic results.

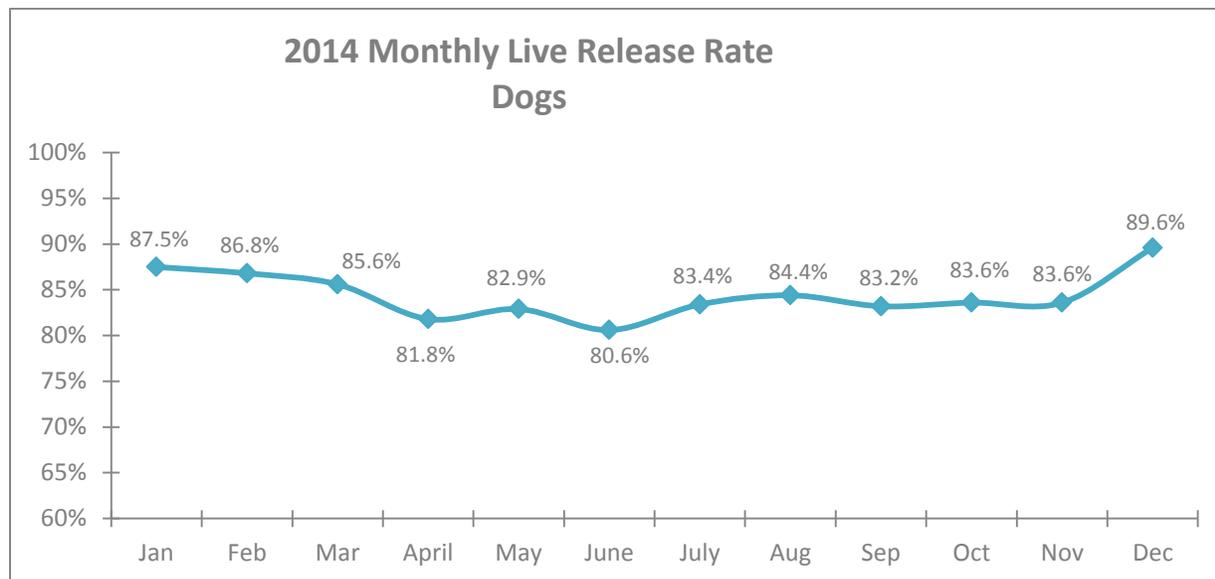
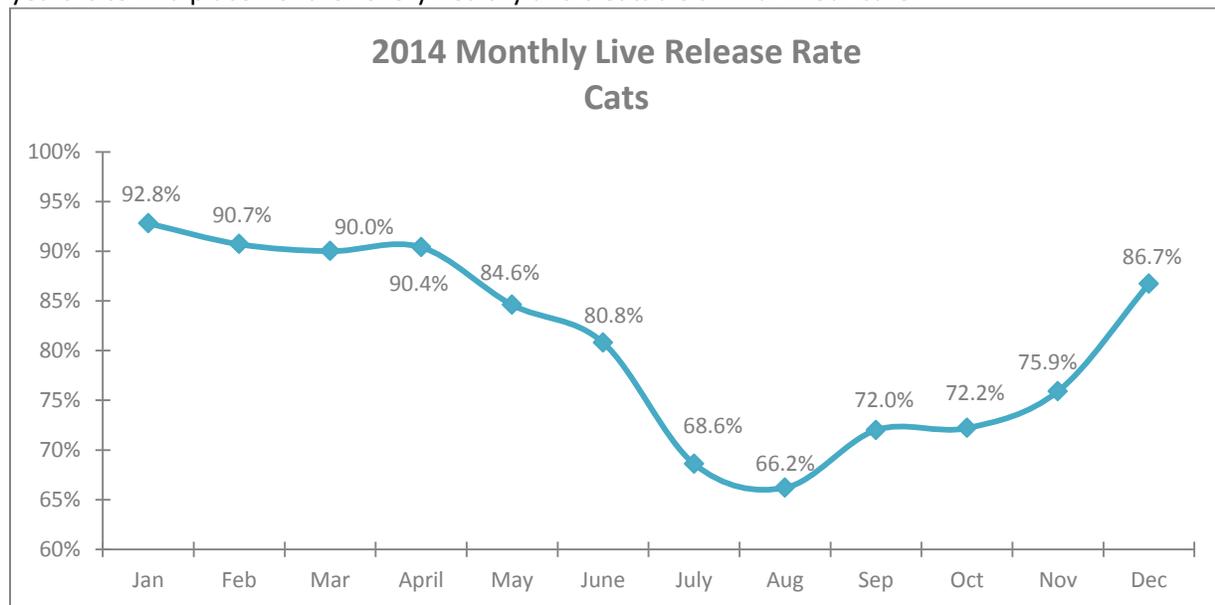
Live Release Rate

Like many shelters across the U.S., AC&C has started tracking its progress in saving the lives of all healthy and treatable animals by measuring its “live release rate.” In 2014 AC&C achieved a Live Release Rate of 80.7% for cats and dogs⁴. And I am very pleased to report that in January 2015, our LRR was 88.8%. The 2014 monthly LRR data shows clearly that AC&C has achieved great success in managing its dog population, with a LRR at 80% or higher throughout the year. The greater challenge is managing the staggering number of cats and their litters that enter the shelter during the summer through fall. Working in concert with other shelters, the ASPCA, our New Hope partners, foster volunteers, DOHMH and other animal welfare organizations, and directing additional resources to

³ Statistics available at www.nycacc.org/statistics.htm

⁴ 2014 AC&C Annual Asilomar Report can be found at www.nycacc.org/statistics

programs targeting cat overpopulation in NYC, we are hopeful that at subsequent oversight hearings we will report marked improvement in our LRR for cats during these critical months. But please note, AC&C will not fall back on our efforts to place even more dogs too. As I said, our goal in the coming years is to find placement for every healthy and treatable animal in our care.



Placement of Animals

The strong partnerships AC&C has cultivated and maintained with our New Hope partners and the excellent animal rescue work these groups do to find new homes for animals are essential components of finding placement for the animals AC&C takes in. Over the last 4 years, we have grown the number of staff in our New Hope department and substantially increased the resources dedicated to make this program successful. We have more than ten staff who have cultivated a pool of 289 New Hope partners, which resulted in over 15,000 animals leaving AC&C. AC&C also adopted out more than 6,000 cats and dogs directly to the public, and is optimistic that adoptions directly to the public will increase moving forward as we add three additional Mobile Adoption Centers for use in the Bronx and Queens in

particular. We are grateful to State Senator Jeff Klein for the funding to purchase, staff and operate one of these vehicles exclusively in the Bronx and to the City and DOHMH for additional capital funding to purchase another two mobile adoption centers.

Progress and growth has been steady and constant since Local Law 59. Essential programs and staff have been added to help keep the animals in our care as happy and healthy as possible and to improve the live outcomes:

- We added a Medical Director and Senior Veterinary Manager/DVM who ensure that as soon as animals arrive, they are vaccinated against common diseases of concern in the shelter environment and are given a screening medical exam to identify additional health concerns that require further attention and/or treatment. Through a grant from the ASPCA, all dogs are also vaccinated against canine influenza upon intake.
- Foster department staff cultivated over 278 foster volunteers, who graciously opened their homes to 998 animals in need of individual attention in 2014.
- Over 25,000 volunteer hours were amassed by 636 volunteers walking dogs, socializing cats, tending to rabbits, participating in offsite adoption and awareness events, allowing AC&C to expand our capacity to provide routine enrichment for our animals, increase adoptions, recruit more fosters and being AC&C ambassadors in the community
- State of the art cat condos, dog kennels and rabbit cages replaced older housing
- Our Behavior & Enrichment Department grew to 24 full time staff to focus on behavior and training, daily dog playgroups and more detailed evaluation of behavior.

Through additional capital funding from DOHMH, we added 12 new field vehicles for rescue, transport to fosters and New Hope partners. Most recently, the city has committed an additional \$8.5 million in capital funding to build an adoption center where the garage is now located at the Manhattan care center; undertake HVAC and other facility improvements at our Brooklyn care center, the addition of two mobile adoption centers, and funding to expand and support a professional, experienced Development department.

Intro No. 485

AC&C is thankful for the support of the Council and is committed to continued improvement of the entire organization. We would welcome the opportunity to improve our services to NYC with an additional two shelters in the Bronx and Queens, especially state of the art facilities that address some of the inherent constraints of our current buildings. However, it is essential to also have adequate funding to support the many departments and staff required to care for and find homes for 30,000+ animals. Finding or building new facilities without adequate funding to sustain a level of performance that is at a minimum equal to where AC&C is now, would simply set up AC&C (or any other vendor) to fail. We urge the council to consider the costs associated with making NYC's animal sheltering system premier,— not just buildings —before voting on a mandate that has no funding to sustain and improve the live release rate and animal welfare services in NYC.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to take any questions.