

Animal Cruelty Investigations Advisory Board Meeting

July 2, 2024

10 AM

Via Zoom

MINUTES

Member Attendees

Sally Adams (from 10:18 AM)
Pam Brown
Jennifer Firpo
Kristin Haas
Erika Holm
Mary McFaun
Kelly Price
Thomas M. "Mike" Scott
Trevor Whipple

Other Attendee

Wilda White

I. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mary McFaun made a motion to approve the January 16, 2024, Meeting Minutes; the motion was seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Kelly Price did not vote.

II. ACIAB Next Steps Post-Act 167 (H.626)

The board discussed next steps after the enactment of H.626, an act relating to animal cruelty, which became law on July1, 2024.

The board committed to keeping an eye on the hiring of the Director of Animal Control position.

III. Animal Cruelty Investigations Flow Chart Discussion

At the request of DPS, the board discussed the creation of a flow chart for routing calls alleging animal cruelty.

The discussion about how animal cruelty calls are currently routed revealed the following

- There's no standardized system across the state for handling these calls.

- Calls often go to various entities including local police, town offices, animal control officers, or state agencies.
- Fish and Wildlife wardens are currently handling many of these calls as a long-term, temporary measure.
- Dispatch centers (PSAPs) often act as the first filter for calls, then route them to appropriate agencies.
- There's confusion about which calls should go to local authorities versus state agencies.
- The system is fragmented, leading to inconsistent responses across different municipalities.

The board agreed that a flow chart was not possible because of the complexity of the issue and the ongoing fragmentation of animal welfare responsibilities.

Wilda White, who made the request, thanked the board for discussing the issue and said she had gained enough information to craft a document for use by DPS to route the calls.

There was also a discussion about the tracking of expenses and time devoted to animal cruelty investigations, which included the comments.

- Wilda White mentioned that DPS has sent a letter to all state agencies requesting they track time and expenses related to animal cruelty.
- Fish and Wildlife has recently added a specific line item to their timesheets for tracking this work.
- There are challenges in accurately capturing all time spent, especially for informal conversations and activities integrated into other tasks.
- Some agencies face bureaucratic obstacles in adding new categories to their timesheets.
- There's difficulty in quantifying time spent on animal welfare issues that are woven throughout other daily activities.
- Trevor Whipple suggested contacting Valcour administrators to see what data might already exist in their system.

There was no formal action taken.

IV. Animal Cruelty Investigation Training

The discussion on animal cruelty investigations training raised the following issues:

- The need for a comprehensive training program for ACOs and law enforcement officers.
- Challenges in developing curriculum due to lack of resources and subject matter experts.
- Concerns about training civilians to conduct criminal investigations.
- Suggestions to look at other states' training programs, particularly Maine's, for guidance.
- The possibility of creating a hybrid training that combines existing law enforcement training with animal-specific content.

- Debate over whether to use the current 4-hour training given within the full law enforcement training or develop a more robust program.
- Discussion of potentially sending someone to audit training in another state to gather insights.
- Consideration of multidisciplinary teams for investigations, similar to child abuse cases.

The board also discussed the role of ACOs and humane officers. The discussion covered several key points:

- Confusion over ACO authority under the new Act 157, particularly regarding their ability to conduct investigations.
- Concerns about untrained ACOs potentially mishandling evidence or violating rights during investigations.
- Recognition that ACOs can still provide valuable services and be good witnesses, even if they can't formally investigate.
- Whether non-law enforcement officers (ACOs) should be trained to conduct criminal justice investigations.
- Suggestion to consider multidisciplinary teams for investigations, similar to child abuse cases.
- Acknowledgment of ACOs' subject matter expertise and community credibility.
- Discussion about the need for clear guidelines on what ACOs can and cannot do in their roles.
- Consideration of providing some level of training to ACOs to prevent them from "mucking things up" during initial responses.

The consensus was that ACOs play an important role, but there are significant challenges in defining and standardizing their responsibilities across different municipalities.

The board agreed to continue the discussion about training at a future meeting, and to explore options for developing an appropriate curriculum for Vermont's needs.

There was no formal action taken.

V. Future Meetings

Chair Erika Holm suggested scheduling another ACIAB meeting soon to further discuss the animal cruelty investigation training requirements and develop a path forward. She proposed that committee members take some time to review the information shared about [law enforcement training levels](#), and then regroup quickly to work on putting something forward regarding the training.

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Chair Holm indicated that she would circulate a Doodle poll to select the next meeting date. Chair Holm reminded members that the Board is required to meet six times a year. To date, the Board has met twice.

VI. Adjournment

Sally Adams made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Mary McFaun, and approved by acclamation.