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Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Animal Services in Sonoma County: Separate and Not Equal

Report Date: June 13, 2025

Response by: Mary Gourley

Title: Interim City Manager

Agency/Department Name: City of Sebastopol

FINDINGS:

[List numbers: ie. F1, F2] **The Sebastopol City Council (R1-R2, R4-6, F1-F3, F6-F10)**

The Sebastopol City Council (R1-R2, R4-6, F1-F3, F6-F11)

R1. By November 1, 2025, the Board of Supervisors will direct DHS to establish an Animal Services Task Force comprising county, city, and shelter representatives to revisit the 2012 DHS Animal Services Report and recommend a governance structure for animal services that will: 1) provide county-wide oversight to ensure compliance with State Law; 2) standardize fees and engage a common licensing vendor to enhance public health and safety, licensing rates and revenue, and; 3) achieve economic efficiencies through shared resources. (F1, F3, F4-F6 and F9-F10)

City Response: The City of Sebastopol agrees with Grand Jury Recommendation R1 and supports the establishment of an Animal Services Task Force by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, as outlined in the report. While the authority to carry out this recommendation rests with the Board of Supervisors, the City commits to participating in the Task Force and contributing to discussions on governance, service standards, and licensing practices, and will provide feedback and recommendations in a timely manner to support county-wide animal services improvements.

R2. By January 1, 2026, each of Sonoma County's 9 cities will delegate one or more representatives to participate in the county-wide Animal Services Task Force convened by DHS. (F1)

City Response: The City of Sebastopol agrees with Grand Jury Recommendation R2 and will designate one or more representatives to participate in the county-wide Animal Services Task Force convened by the Department of Health Services (DHS) by the requested date of January 1, 2026.

The City is committed to active engagement in the Task Force to collaborate with other Sonoma County cities, county officials, and shelter representatives. City representatives will provide input and feedback to support the development of a coordinated governance structure, standardized fees, and efficient animal services across the county.

R4. By May 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors will direct DHS to launch a county-wide public information campaign in cooperation with the cities to explain the legal imperative and benefits of licensing pets. The campaign will commence no later than July 1, 2026. (F7-F9)

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Recommendation R4 and supports the launch of a county-wide public information campaign by the Board of Supervisors and the Department of Health Services (DHS) to explain the legal requirements and benefits of licensing pets.

The City is committed to cooperating with DHS and other Sonoma County cities to help design and disseminate accurate and effective messaging to the public. Sebastopol will assist in promoting the campaign within the community and encouraging pet owners to comply with licensing requirements, thereby supporting public health, safety, and responsible pet ownership.

R5. By November 1, 2025, each city contracting with North Bay Animal Services will inspect and evaluate the shelter condition, and evaluate the shelter operation and animal control services, to determine whether NBAS is complying with legal mandates and other terms of its contract. (F2, FI I-FI2)

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Recommendation R5 and has already conducted a thorough inspection and evaluation of North Bay Animal Services (NBAS).

The City has assessed the condition of the shelter, evaluated shelter operations, and reviewed the provision of animal control services to determine whether NBAS is complying with legal mandates and the terms of its contract. The City is committed to taking any necessary corrective actions in collaboration with NBAS to ensure that animal care and control services meet legal, operational, and community standards.

R6. By September 30, 2025, each of the cities that contracts with NBAS will require quarterly reports that include data and performance criteria sufficient to evaluate compliance with its contract and all relevant laws. (F2, FI I)

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Recommendation R6. The City is issuing a request for proposals to solicit a new long-term animal services provider. The City will require the selected entity (including North Bay Animal Services (NBAS) if they are selected) to submit quarterly reports beginning no later than 30 days from award of contract.

These reports will be required to include data and performance metrics sufficient to evaluate the provider's compliance with the terms of its contract and all applicable laws. The City is committed to reviewing these reports regularly and taking appropriate action to ensure that animal control services meet legal requirements and community expectations.

FI. Failure by the county and its nine cities to adopt recommendations in the 2012 DHS Animal Services Report has left Sonoma County animal service agencies operating without shared standards, communication channels, data sharing or oversight.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Finding F1 and concurs that the absence of county-wide adoption of the 2012 DHS Animal Services Report may have resulted in inconsistent standards, limited communication, and gaps in oversight among animal service agencies.

The City is committed to participating in county-wide efforts, including the Animal Services Task Force, to establish shared standards, improve communication channels, enhance data sharing, and strengthen oversight. Sebastopol will actively collaborate with other cities, the county, and shelter representatives to help implement a more coordinated and effective animal services system. However, the City does not have any authority to adopt standards outside of Sebastopol.

F2. Services provided to the four Sonoma County cities by North Bay Animal Services are non-compliant either with state laws or industry standards for the care of shelter animals as specified in its contracts.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Finding F2 and recognizes that North Bay Animal Services (NBAS) must fully comply with state laws and industry standards for the care of shelter animals as outlined in its contracts with the four Sonoma County cities. While the City does not necessarily agree with every allegation regarding services in the Grand Jury's report, the City agrees there are areas for service improvements.

The City is committed to actively monitoring NBAS operations through regular inspections, quarterly reporting, and contract compliance evaluations. Sebastopol will work collaboratively with NBAS and other contracting cities to ensure that animal control and shelter services meet legal requirements, contractual obligations, and community expectations for humane and professional care.

F3. A lack of coordination between SCAS and NBAS is an obstacle to a fully coordinated implementation of the county-wide disaster response plan for animal evacuations.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol agrees with Grand Jury Finding F3 and recognizes coordination is key between Sonoma County Animal Services (SCAS) and North Bay Animal Services (NBAS) and is essential to ensure an effective, county-wide disaster response for animal evacuations.

The City supports efforts by the County to establish clear communication protocols, shared training opportunities, and joint planning exercises between SCAS, NBAS, and other municipal and nonprofit animal service providers. We encourage the development of a unified operational framework that addresses roles, responsibilities, and resource sharing before, during, and after disaster events to eliminate service gaps and reduce delays in animal evacuation and care.

F6. Having multiple different fee structures for animal licenses and services is confusing to the public and complicates billing and collection of license fees and fines.

Having multiple different fee structures for animal licenses and services is confusing to the public and complicates billing and collection of license fees and fines.

A consistent fee structure across jurisdictions would improve public understanding, simplify administration, and reduce the risk of errors in billing and collection. However, fees must reflect the cost of the services provided. If different levels of services are provided to different cities, or the costs of services differ across jurisdictions, uniform fees will not be possible.

F7. Failure to achieve high levels of licensing in all government jurisdictions and provide access to shared information undermines mandated rabies control, makes it more difficult to return lost pets, and results in a loss of revenue.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Finding F7 that failure to achieve high levels of licensing in all government jurisdictions and provide access to shared information undermines mandated rabies control, makes it more difficult to return lost pets, and results in a loss of revenue.

Increased licensing compliance and access to shared licensing data are essential for effective rabies control, reuniting lost pets with their owners, and ensuring revenues received are necessary to support animal services.

F8. Based on SCAS data, uniform adoption of online licensing management through DocuPet (or a comparable vendor) would increase county-wide licensing rates and enhance compliance with state law.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol agrees with Grand Jury Finding F8 that uniform adoption of online licensing management through DocuPet (or a comparable vendor) would increase county-wide licensing rates and enhance compliance with state law.

A standardized online licensing system would streamline processes, improve compliance, and make licensing more accessible for residents.

F9. Failure to promote the benefits and legal requirement to license dogs, and failing consistently to send license renewal reminders, contribute to low license compliance and loss of revenue.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Finding F9 that failure to promote the benefits and legal requirement to license dogs, and failing consistently to send license renewal reminders, contribute to low license compliance and loss of revenue.

Consistent public education and timely renewal reminders are important strategies to improve licensing compliance and maintain revenue.

F10. Making centralized training resources available could enhance performance of animal services employees and volunteers.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol agrees with Grand Jury Finding F10 that making centralized training resources available could enhance performance of animal services employees and volunteers.

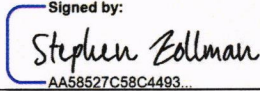
Centralized training resources would help ensure consistent performance standards and enhance service quality across jurisdictions.

F11. Insufficient oversight either by the cities or by the organization's board of directors has allowed NBAS to be non-compliant with state law and the terms of its contracts by: failing to effectively manage licensing and renewals; failing to offer legally mandated rabies vaccination clinics; failing to perform legally mandated spay/neuter of animals prior to placement; failing to consistently submit bite reports to the county health officer (through SCAS); failing to maintain the Petaluma animal shelter in compliance with industry standards; and failing to collect accurate data and provide reports that demonstrate compliance with contract terms.

City Response: The City of Sebastopol acknowledges Grand Jury Finding F11.

The City recognizes that oversight of contracted services is essential to ensure compliance with state law, contractual obligations, and industry standards. While NBAS has provided needed services to the community, the concerns identified by the Grand Jury warrant attention, corrective action, and improved reporting mechanisms. The City is taking steps to implement enhanced oversight measures to ensure contractual and legal compliance. The City can't comment on the level of oversight by other jurisdictions.

Date: 9/8/2025

Signed: 
AA58527C58C4493...
Mayor Stephen Zollman

Number of pages attached:

(See attached PC Civil Grand Jury Response Requirements)

City Council

Mayor Stephen Zollman
Vice Mayor Jill McLewis
Phill Carter
Neysa Hinton
Sandra Maurer



City of Sebastopol

Acting City Manager
Assistant City Manager/
City Clerk, MMC

Mary Gourley
mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov

September 3, 2025

Honorable Chris Honigsberg
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of Sonoma County
Hall of Justice
600 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

And

Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury
P.O. Box 5109
Santa Rosa, CA 95402
grand.jury@sonoma-county.org

Subject: City of Sebastopol Response to the Grand Jury

Dear Honorable Chris Honigsberg:

This letter is submitted on behalf of the City Council of the City of Sebastopol. On June 13, 2025, the City of Sebastopol ("City") received a letter from the Sonoma County Grand Jury which attached a copy of the Civil Grand Jury Report: Animal Services in Sonoma County: Separate and Not Equal (hereafter "Report"). The report is attached for reference.

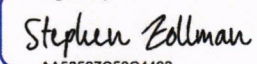
The City has determined the release date as June 13, 2025.

Penal Code Section 933 (c) requires that the governing board of the public agency (here, the City Council) is required to respond not later than 90 days after the public release date. As required, the City Council of the City of Sebastopol respectfully submits the following responses to the Findings and Recommendations in the Report in the form required by the Penal Code.

Pursuant to California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, this letter documents the City's responses to each finding in the Grand Jury Report (hereinafter "City Response"). The City Response was prepared by City staff, including the Police Chief who's department oversees animal control and presented to the City Council for their consideration. At the public meeting on September 2, 2025, the City Council approved this City Response, and directed the City Manager to submit this City Response.

The City of Sebastopol thanks the Grand Jury for its service during the 2024-2025 term. If you or the Grand Jury Foreperson have any questions regarding the City's response, please contact Interim City Manager Mary Gourley at email: mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

AA58527C58C4493...
Stephen Zollman
Mayor

CF: Sonoma County Grand Jury