

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 31, 2025 update

TO: County Executive Agard, Mayor Rhodes-Conway

FROM: Janel Heinrich, Executive Director / Health Officer, Bonnie Armstrong, Environmental Health Division Director

SUBJECT: Response to DCHS's July 8, 2025 Letter to the Mayor and County Executive

The humane care and treatment of animals in Dane County is the responsibility of Public Health Madison & Dane County (Public Health) in accordance with state statutes and city and county ordinances. Our department employs six Humane Officers in the Animal Service Program who work collaboratively with law enforcement to enforce animal welfare and control laws. Animals taken into custody—whether due to abandonment, impoundment, or ongoing investigations—must receive appropriate care and shelter while their legal status is determined or reunification with owners is pursued. To provide this care, Public Health contracts with Dane County Humane Society (DCHS) for sheltering services. This agreement is reviewed and updated annually to meet the evolving needs of both parties.

In 2024, DCHS put forth terms for a significant rate increase to reflect rising operational costs. In 2025, DCHS sought another rate increase, resulting in a shift to a flat fee of \$250 per animal. Now, for 2026, DCHS is advocating for a \$2 per capita rate based on Dane County's population, which would increase our contract cost to approximately \$1.2 million—more than double our 2025 costs and a 200%+ increase over the past three years.

In response to increased sheltering costs, Public Health has already taken several steps to increase revenue and decrease program costs:

- Increased licensing fees (2024)
- Implemented redemption fee billing system (2025)
- Scaled back non-mandated services such as wildlife calls (2024)

Despite our efforts to collaborate and adapt, the substantial increases in sheltering costs remain a significant burden. While we recognize that costs of providing care have increased over time, the proposed per capita model is not aligned with actual service utilization nor is it consistent with the statutory and ordinance-based responsibilities of Public Health. As a governmental agency operating on behalf of the City and County, our role is to fulfill services that are mandated by state statutes and local

ordinances. While we value the broader mission of DCHS, our public funding is designated specifically for those mandated and actual services and does not extend to additional activities beyond that scope.

When we reflect upon the numbers of animals admitted to DCHS over the past 10 years, this number has remained low. For context, 3,008 animals were admitted in 2013, compared to just 2,189 in 2024. We share this to demonstrate that demand for contracted services varies from year to year based on factors such as the number of stray animals, bite incidents, and related investigations. Due to the inherently unpredictable nature of this work, we believe a fee-for-service model based on an agreed-upon rate schedule is both practical and fiscally responsible. This model ensures that Public Health pays only for services actually used, rather than committing public funds to a flat-rate contract that may overestimate service demand.

Over the past ten years (2014–2024), this fee for service approach has provided cost-efficiency and flexibility, enabling Public Health to respond to actual needs while avoiding unnecessary expenditures more than service need. As shown in the table below, in most years, the total amount paid for services was significantly less than the maximum contract amount. Over the decade, this model has resulted in over \$425,000 in *unspent* budgeted funds, underscoring the advantage of paying for services based on actual demand. The fee for service structure allows Public Health to be a responsible steward of taxpayer resources by ensuring funds are allocated proportionately to actual community needs. In contrast, a per capita model could lead to overpayment during years with lower service needs.

Table 1: Contract Amount vs Final Amount Paid (2014-2024)

Year	Contracted Amount	Final Amount Paid	Difference
2014	\$390,000	\$341,708	-\$48,292
2015	\$390,000	\$387,952	-\$2,048
2016	\$390,000	\$349,327	-\$40,673
2017	\$390,000	\$393,428	\$3,428
2018	\$390,000	\$380,130	-\$9,870
2019	\$390,000	\$384,381	-\$5,619
2020	\$390,000	\$214,371	-\$175,629
2021	\$390,000	\$265,173	-\$124,827
2022	\$390,000	\$306,128	-\$83,872
2023	\$390,000	\$378,413	-\$11,587
2024	\$550,000	\$623,931	\$73,931
Total	\$4,450,000	\$4,024,942	\$425,058

Over a two-year period (2023/2024), public health and law enforcement brought in 69% of all stray dogs and 49% of all stray cats, the remainder being brought in by the public. Public Health is paying a flat \$250 fee for every animal in Dane County regardless of admission type. Whether admitted by Public Health, law enforcement, or the public - Public Health pays.

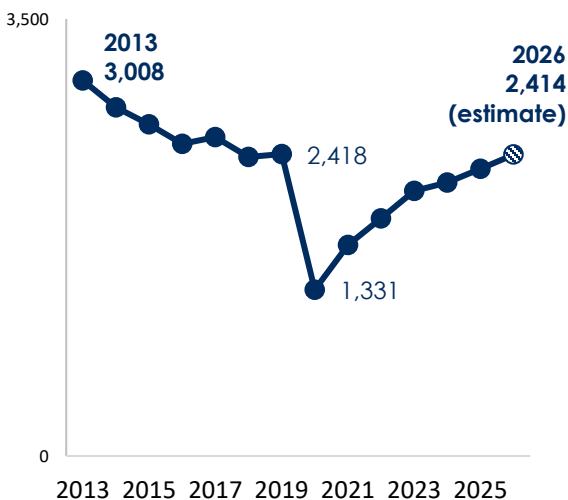
Table 2: Animals Admitted to DCHS for Care

Intake Type	Dogs			Cats		
	2023	2024	2-Year Average %	2023	2024	2-Year Average %
Animal Services Officers	430	391	52.6%	575	615	46.3%
Law Enforcement	119	134	16.2%	50	34	3.3%
Public	253	234	31.2%	582	713	50.4%

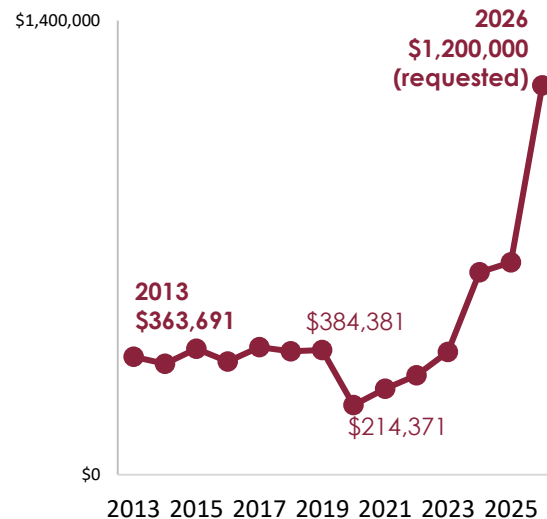
Another way of looking at the trend in animals and contract costs is as follows:



While the total number of animals admitted to Dane County Humane Society is lower than 2013...



...the cost charged to Public Health to shelter animals has more than tripled since 2013.



There are opportunities for Public Health and DCHS to partner to increase revenue to offset the rising sheltering costs as follows:

- **Licensing Enforcement:** Since 2018, dog licensing has declined. In 2023, only 19% of dogs were licensed. Collaborating with the DCHS to require pre-payment of licensing fees before redemption or rehoming could increase compliance and revenue.

- Redemption Fee Collection: Public Health has implemented after-the-fact billing for redemption fees. However, collection success has been limited. A joint effort with DCHS to collect fees at the time of redemption would likely yield better results.

We would also like to address the concerns around Public Health's contractual obligations for payment of sheltering services. Public Health has fulfilled its financial obligations to DCHS every year since 2012. All contracts have been based on transparent, agreed-upon service rates. Our 2025 contract with DCHS was capped at a maximum price of \$344K. We are fully aware this ceiling could be reached as early as August/September of this year, and we retain the ability to amend the contract before reaching the \$344K ceiling when the contract expires. Thus, we have plans to amend the contract for the remainder of 2025.

While staying focused on fulfilling our mandated responsibilities, Public Health remains hopeful about continuing our partnership with DCHS and committed to working together to develop sustainable, equitable solutions that guarantee the humane care and treatment of animals in our community now and into the future.