

Barbara Hedberg

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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September 15, 2020

STANISLAUS COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
1010 10th Street, Suite 6500
Modesto, CA. 95354

ATTENTION: Kristin Olsen, Vita Chiesa,
Terry Withrow, Tom Berryhill
& Jim DeMartini

RE: Stanislaus Animal Services Agency

Dear Members of the Board:

My name is Barbara Hedberg. I am a long-time resident of Modesto and have worked in the legal field locally for over 30 years. I am a tax payer, a voter and an admitted animal lover.

After recently becoming aware of a situation at the local shelter involving mismanagement issues, I am reaching out to my local representatives to make them aware of what is happening at the animal shelter.

This is not my first letter to the Board of Supervisors asking for assistance with the situation at the animal shelter. However, I am hopeful that I can receive the courtesy of a response to this letter.

I started following a case involving a pit bull named Turbo who found himself at the shelter in March 2020 amidst COVID. As I witnessed events unfold, I became concerned as a resident and tax payer regarding the manner in which the local shelter is being managed. From what I learned, I was appalled by the misuse of tax payer money, lack of leadership and poor management.

After receiving no response from my local representatives regarding my concerns, I recently attended a JPA meeting and spoke regarding the situation at the shelter. I was disappointed, to say the least, at the lack of interest and concern shown by the members of the committee and especially the Executive Director of SASA, Annette Patton.

The issues set forth below are events I have personally followed and attended and correspondence and emails I have read. I personally attended court hearings in the superior court; I listened to the entire audio recording of the hearing to determine whether Turbo's actions were that of a vicious dog; and, I received and reviewed documentation from the shelter files.

1. **VIOLATIONS BY SASA EMPLOYEE.**

This entire situation involving the pit bull named Turbo began because one employee at the shelter violated shelter regulations and protocol. It is my understanding that when a dog is removed from the kennel to go outside to be evaluated, there is to be at least two employees/volunteers present. The SASA employee removed Turbo from his kennel to lead him outside *alone*. This employee knowingly led Turbo to a fenced area outside, next to another male dog for the evaluation, which dictated obvious failure. The employee knew that Turbo had been locked in the kennel for several days and would be excited to go outside. She also knew that the other male dog was outside in the fenced area right next to where she was taking Turbo for his evaluation. Common sense tells even the lay person that she is setting this dog up for failure. Not to mention against shelter rules, regulations and protocol.

Turbo and the other male dog began fence fighting. The SASA employee testified that she placed herself in between Turbo, the fence and the other dog. By placing herself in jeopardy she admitted that she "lost her balance and fell to the ground". The SASA employee said once she fell to the ground, she thought he was going to attack her so she punched Turbo in the face. Turbo did nothing in return to the employee. Common sense says that if Turbo attacked the employee, she would have needed stitches, surgery or even worse. She did not require stitches, did not require surgery and never missed any time from work. Personally, it seems that the employee did fall to the ground and did injury herself. But, after listening to her entire testimony under oath at the hearing, I find her story ridiculous and hard to believe.

- Did SASA management make changes after this incident?
- Was the employee reprimanded for her violations?
- Did the employee receive counseling?
- Did SASA provide the employee with additional training?
- **No**

The Executive Director, Annette Patton began an action to kill Turbo. This could have all been avoided with proper management and leadership at the shelter.

2. THE HEARING REQUESTED BY SASA TO KILL TURBO.

Annette Patton started the proceeding to label Turbo a vicious dog. Patton enlisted the help of a so-called “impartial hearing officer” to conduct the Turbo hearing. *This hearing officer is a local attorney who practices primarily in bankruptcy law. There is absolutely no information that this attorney has any special knowledge or abilities with regard to animal behavior or animal training.* However, there is evidence that this impartial hearing officer is *regularly employed in this capacity by SASA. This does not suggest impartiality.* I have read communications from SASA files by Annette Patton enlisting this impartial hearing officer’s help in the Turbo case in which she labeled the hearing as a “*vicious dog hearing*”. She did this prior to any determination and by doing so suggested her preferred outcome. *Her actions create a presumption of bias.*

I have also seen emails between this impartial hearing officer and other SASA employees in which an employee *tells the hearing officer what the outcome of a certain hearing should be.* These emails indicate that the hearing officer was not impartial, but was acting at the behest of SASA employees. The emails suggest a coziness between the hearing officer and SASA employees, which contradicts the notion of an impartial hearing officer.

Executive Director, Annette Patton, as the manager and leader of SASA and SASA employees should never have let this happen. This is another example of the inept management and leadership of this shelter.

3. TESTIMONY AT THE HEARING.

Annette Patton hired an out of state expert witness, Kelley Bollen to testify at the Turbo hearing. Patton demonstrates further ineptitude in hiring this so-called expert. This expert is located out of the State of California and was hired with tax payer dollars. This expert was hired to help secure the outcome that Patton wanted, and that was to label Turbo as vicious and ultimately killed.

This is what experts do when hired to testify, however, this is a better example of how Patton continued to load the deck in the Turbo matter. First, *she hires a biased hearing officer; then she further stacks the deck by hiring this expert to*

testify the way she wants her to testify, and that's exactly what she did. *Without ever personally interacting with Turbo*, this expert offered an opinion and letter to Patton that the dog was vicious and should be killed. The expert witness never once evaluated or assessed this dog. *NEVER*.

Annette Patton's response to this opinion provided by her expert was "**your letter is fantastic**". *The very letter which condemned Turbo to be killed*.

The hired expert, Kelley Bollen further responded to Patton by suggesting that "**if she needed anything changed in the opinion letter, just let her know and she will edit**". This expert was paid for with tax payer dollars.

- Why was Annette Patton working so hard for this outcome?
- Was it to protect Turbo?
- Was it to protect the community?
- Do the actions taken by Annette Patton radiate transparency or integrity?
- **Absolutely not!**

It was to cover up the actions of a negligent employee who violated shelter protocol and policies, but ultimately to protect herself because it is her mismanagement and poor leadership that allowed this employee to do what she did which created this situation.

4. **THERE WERE THREE RESCUES OFFERING TO TAKE TURBO.**

There were three rescue organizations contacting Patton and offering to take Turbo to save his life. All rescue organizations were willing to sign legal releases of liability and hold harmless agreements releasing the county from any liability. Members of the community and private donors were offering substantial financial support and help implementing programs to help the shelter with more challenging dogs, all in an effort to save Turbo's life. But, instead of embracing a positive collaborative relationship with the rescues that work tirelessly to help save hundreds of SASA dogs, Annette Patton chose to kill Turbo.

I question the ethics of an Executive Director in charge of my local shelter who would chose to kill this dog instead of at least making an effort to try and work with the rescue organizations to save his life. Especially since it is noted that Patton *promised to “keep Turbo safe”*. It is also noted that it was *Annette Patton who ordered Turbo to be euthanized*.

In fact, I read where Patton refers to these rescue organizations, the same rescues that save hundreds of SASA dogs, as “**shelter bashers**”. I find this unacceptable, unprofessional and an example of her arrogance and ignorance. Why wouldn’t this executive director want to work in unison with rescues to promote a positive image for our local shelter and ultimately save dogs lives? Isn’t that her job?

Tax payer dollars are being wasted and grossly mismanaged at our local animal shelter. Animals are being treated inhumanly and killed unnecessarily everyday by the poor management at our local animal shelter.

I find it distressing that the person in charge at the shelter would rather kill dogs than work together with the rescue organizations to do just that...*RESCUE* and save the dogs. Is this the image we want our animal shelter to convey to the local tax payers or large organizations such as Petco and many others who generously donate and support our local shelter?

For these reasons, all of which can be proven and substantiated, I respectfully request that the Board of Supervisors:

- Request that Annette Patton, Executive Director at SASA report back to the Board of Supervisors addressing each and every allegation contained in this letter.
- Request that Annette Patton, Executive Director at SASA report to the Board of Supervisors as to each and every corrective measure she has implemented at the shelter as to each and every allegation set forth in this letter.
- Request that Annette Patton, Executive Director at SASA be required to personally *attend* an upcoming Board of Supervisor’s Meeting during the year 2020, and report publicly as to each and every allegation contained in this letter as well as all corrective measures she has implemented at the shelter regarding the allegations.

The corruption and lack of transparency at the shelter has gone on long enough, and the concern and outrage by the public in Stanislaus County and beyond is only growing larger and will not go away.

Accordingly, I request that this matter involving the mismanagement of Stanislaus Animal Shelter and tax payer dollars be placed on your Agenda and be addressed publicly at an upcoming Board of Supervisor's Meeting during the year 2020.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding the above allegations.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Hedberg