

February 18, 2021

To: Mayor and Members of City Council
From: Paula Boggs Muething, City Manager
Subject: Animal Abuse Database

202100690

REFERENCE DOCUMENT #202001852

On September 21, 2020, Cincinnati City Council passed the following motion:

MOTION We MOVE that the Administration coordinate with the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts and the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners to create a searchable database of individuals convicted of animal abuse to be provided to animal shelters, adoption agencies, and foster agencies.

Council's consideration of the motion did not include a report from the Administration on the feasibility of the proposal. The following report provides the Administration's response and recommendation on the above motion.

REPORT

The Hamilton County Clerk of Courts maintains a public database that houses all information related to animal abuse criminal charges and cases in Hamilton County and the jurisdictions within the county. That database is searchable. The City of Cincinnati does not separately maintain a database of information on individuals charged or convicted of animal abuse.

Following passage of the Council motion, Councilmember Seelbach's office hosted a meeting on November 5, 2020, convening individuals from animal shelters, adoption agencies, and City and County staff. The meeting discussed the Councilmember's vision for a searchable database and stakeholders were requested to perform certain action items following this meeting.

The Administration was asked to perform three action items from the November 5, 2020 meeting: to research peer city approaches, coordinate with the County on data, and develop a proposed solution. Following that meeting the Office of Performance and Data Analytics (OPDA) began work on the requested items. OPDA researched peer city approaches to animal abuse, the County's current approach to data sharing related to animal abuse cases, and is returning this report as the solution recommendation. Research shows that most

efforts in this space are led and hosted at the County level and approach it with a registration model, requiring convicted animal abusers to register in a public database in the jurisdiction. Examples include Volusia County in Florida and Cook County in Illinois. OPDA did not find examples leveraging a strategy similar to Council's recommendation. OPDA also found that the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts' website presently provides a searchable database that allows users to search for any person by name and review their court history related to criminal, traffic, and civil cases - including any history of filed complaints against an individual for animal abuse. The site further presently allows for categorical criminal searches - allowing for searches specific to animal abuse offenses that will generate all complaints filed under a given category within a specified time frame.

The requested action in the Council motion, based on the further requests from Councilmember Seelbach, would require OPDA to gain direct access to the County data and create, manage, and maintain a standalone database and to do so without additional resources and while balancing their existing resource commitments.

New requests of OPDA resources are evaluated against the City Manager's Strategic Plan, Department Performance Agreements, and OPDA's strategy for deploying resources. As this request is not in alignment with the guidance in the strategic plan or performance agreement, the office further evaluated the request using the following analysis in order to determine whether it aligns with OPDA's strategy for deploying resources:

- What City decision will be made differently if this project is pursued?
- How will this project impact the performance of a City operation?
- How large will that impact be? How many customers are there of this process?
- Does OPDA have any available capacity?

Leveraging the motion, stakeholder meeting, and initial research OPDA applied the strategy:

- Does the project impact or improve City decision making?
 - The impact on the City decision making matrix is low, at best.
- Does the City control the process and will this project positively impact the performance of a city operation?
 - The City does not control the process of animal abuse court filings or animal adoption. Therefore, this will not have a positive impact on City operations and will detract from resources to assist other processes. Additionally, nearly all applicable sections of the code are set at the state level ORC 941 - 955 with the exception of 955 - 11 CMC Vicious Dog. This project will have little to no impact on City performance.
- How large will that impact be? How many people will use this process?
 - While this will not impact or improve a City operation, the generalized impact is also unclear but will likely be only for select agencies that choose to use this separate database.
- Does OPDA have any available capacity?
 - The core functions of OPDA are coordinating and reporting pandemic response activities, process improvements to improve City operations, and data

collection and tracking to increase transparency of City government operations. These functions are critical to City operations. Given the time commitments required by these functions, OPDA does not have additional capacity.

Pursuant to this analysis, OPDA concluded the proposed project is inconsistent with its strategy for deployment of resources.

The Clerk of Courts' system is a public database that is searchable by offender name, among other search categories. A more specialized database, beyond this existing public, searchable database, will have the most efficacy and can be most efficiently implemented as a County-level initiative, as the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts maintains all records related to these offenses. Based on conversations with the Clerk of Courts, it is our understanding that minor adjustments to the current categorical coding of animal abuse offenses may be possible to provide improved search functionality for interested parties. The City does not control or have direct access to the primary data source that is central to creating, managing, and maintaining the proposed database. The creation of a stand-alone database for this purpose with the challenges set forth will divert limited staff resources and capacity. Accordingly, the City Administration recommends the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts take steps to improve the existing database.

cc: Nicollette Staton, Director, Performance & Data Analytics