

**Statement of Mr. Charles W. Wilson, Director
Prince George's County Department of Environmental Resources
At the Animal Services Facility, Upper Marlboro, MD
November 12, 2009**

It is a new day at Prince George's County Animal Management. In July, 2009, this county opened up the new Animal Management facility on Brown Station Road. This 37,000 square foot, state of the art facility, one of the newest in the nation, boasts modern design -- with a 21st-century ventilation system, sound dampening controls, natural lighting, and bioretention landscaping. It contains 250 kennel runs which greatly increases our ability to house homeless animals, an exotic animal room, a spay/neuter clinic, an isolation/quarantine area, and a soothing reflection room that provides pet owners with a quiet place for bereavement. We've created a facility that is welcoming, friendly, sunny and pleasant to visit.

This project has been a personal priority of many as well as that of County Executive Johnson and his administration. As advocates for the humane treatment of all animals, the county executive and I are extremely proud of the design of the new shelter and the promise that this new facility will improve services for all county residents, both two-legged and four!

Now that we have one of the greatest animal care facilities in the nation, we are in a unique position ... to initiate the greatest animal care program in the nation.

Beginning today, the Prince George's County Animal Management Group will have a new name and a new goal. The Animal Management Group will be known as Animal Care and Control and our goal is to find a loving home for each and every healthy, treatable companion animal, while maintaining a high level of public safety. This Philosophy of Life does not come without huge challenges, sacrifices, and the cooperation of many partners. But it is the natural goal of a compassionate community, and Prince George's county is indeed, a compassionate community.

We will bring this Philosophy of Life to the county in a number of tangible ways.

By establishing priorities and aligning our actions with those priorities to save more animals immediately. Those policies and priorities include creating lifesaving solutions for the animals; directly involving the community in our work; delivering quality customer service; providing excellent care for the animals; and positioning Animal Care and Control as an open, community resource for our citizens and the animals.

We will establish and enhance our adoption program. Adoptions are vital to Animal Care and Control's lifesaving mission. Our data indicates there are many pet owners and future pet owners in this county that we have not reached in the past, and we have statistics to prove that. It's huge. Other studies indicate that only 15 to 20% of new pets are acquired from a shelter. We need to do a little better job of advertising our services and marketing ourselves as a place to come. Our shelter has a greater variety of adoptable animals than anywhere else for miles around! There is someone for everyone at our shelter. Our goal is to make quality adoptions to more families that ever before ... in our county and beyond. We will do this by developing sound, aggressive programs and streamlining the adoption process. We will increase public access hours for working families, holding adoption events in local neighborhoods - that was a suggestion and we have started that - in neighborhoods and communities, thereby bringing the

"animals to the people", offering special adoption incentives, and better marketing of the shelter, it's programs, and available pets.

An often overlooked area of potential gains is improving the likelihood that lost pets and their owners will be reunited. The shelter will be even more proactive than before in this effort. When an animal control officer finds a stray animal in the field with some sort of identification, either license, rabies tag, identification tag, or microchip or whatever that might be; they will do whatever they can to bring that animal back to its home either by contacting the owner or a neighbor, instead of taking to the animal control facility. These actions will be followed up to ensure that the owner is doing everything he or she can to make sure their pet does not stray again, thereby increasing public safety as well. We will continue to ask the community to play its part by making sure their animals are licensed and have some sort of identification.

We will advocate for a change in county statute that treats all animals fairly and equitably while promoting and maintaining public safety.

We will actively work to keep animals out of our shelter. After all, shelters are stressful places for animals and should be a place of last resort, not a readily available dumping ground. Many of the reasons why people bring animals to the shelter or abandon them are highly resolvable. But many pet owners are, understandably, not animal behavior experts, and they might not have the tools they need to fix a problem. But most problems are fixable, and lots of people are willing to try a few things to help keep their pet. Sometimes we'll be able to provide practical assistance, such as spay/neuter services, or pet food, or a bit of information or moral support. Call us before you are on your last nerve and before you've given up on your pet. Chances are we can help you or refer you to someone who can.

In order to meet our commitment to a lifesaving guarantee for all savable animals, we will need to keep animals happy and healthy and keep animals moving through the system. To do this, we will implement comprehensive vaccination, handling, cleaning, socialization and care policies before animals get sick; and rehabilitative efforts for those who come in sick, injured, unweaned or traumatized.

This is where our community partners come in. We are going to get the right people on the bus by inviting community rescue groups and individuals alike. We will create a foster network in which puppies, kittens, mothers-to-be, elderly or otherwise challenged animals, will be placed into the temporary care of a loving foster individual or family who, working closely with the shelter and in accordance with agreed to guidelines, will help that animal become adoptable.

As we take steps to transform Animal Care and Control into a model program, we will be inviting feedback from our partners and the community. We will use this feedback to improve our performance and speed our progress towards our goal. We will be publishing data which will help to chart our progress along the route.

The vision for the Prince George's Animal Care and Control is to be the premier animal shelter system in the nation and a leader in progressive programs and compassion. This goal can only be achieved with the support of this community and a dedicated and committed staff. Together, we can create a new day for the animals and citizens of our county.