

1. Response to DCist and NPR article

In August 2023 the DCist, a locally based website, published an article about our organization that was replete with inaccuracies. This article, which purported to be about conditions at our facilities, was crafted by a writer who based her reporting on out-of-context photographs and hearsay from a small group of volunteers. Despite our open invitation to visit our facilities at any time unannounced and meet with our staff, the reporter wrote her piece without ever setting foot in our doors.

We were deeply disappointed that on August 25, 2023, WAMU (NPR's Washington affiliate, which owned and has subsequently closed down the DCist) republished this article as we were in the process of contesting its content for its litany of falsehoods. In an email and phone call to the DCist editor, Natalie Delgadillo, we pointed out the article's many inaccuracies, provided the facts, and asked for an immediate correction.

It is well documented that animal shelters across the nation are seeing higher levels of animal relinquishment and shelter admission, while pet adoptions are failing to keep up with intake (as written in Vox, The Washington Post, CBS News, PBS NewsHour, the Los Angeles Times, and many more). Most animal shelters in America are over capacity, and last summer HRA was at peak population for dogs in our care. To learn more about the measures we implemented to address those challenging summer months, read our blog from July 2023.

As the uptick in dogs entering our shelters persisted during the late summer and early fall of 2023, we made the decision to temporarily house some dogs in crates (as many owners do when they are away from home) until larger cages and kennels, or community foster homes, became available. It was either this temporary housing, or euthanasia – which we refused to do because these dogs were highly adoptable. This temporary use of crates, while never our first choice, enabled us to save many precious lives.

As stewards of animal welfare, our team prioritizes the wellbeing of animals in our care. We recognize the challenges dogs encounter when adjusting to new environments, especially within an institutional setting. Dogs who are not housetrained, or who are experiencing stress from the trauma of surrender, have frequent accidents; at any snapshot of time, someone's kennel could look unkempt. We have established, and follow, strong cleaning protocols; our care staff conducts thorough deep cleaning of each kennel every morning, seven days a week. We also do frequent bedding changes and spot cleaning throughout the day. Volunteers and staff regularly walk our dogs – for some dogs, as many as four times a day.

We were pleased that amid these unfounded allegations the Washington, D.C., Department of Health conducted at least a half dozen surprise inspections of our facilities. In each case they reported that the animals were well cared for, had access to food and water, and they found no evidence to substantiate the allegations which were made in this spurious article.

If our colleagues' experience (and national shelter data trends) is any indication, we will be navigating through these population challenges for the near future. And we are constantly learning, innovating, and adapting to these shifting dynamics with a fierce commitment to providing compassionate care for each animal with whom we are entrusted. We are proud that our community has demonstrated its support through adopting animals from us, volunteering, and donating money and other much-needed resources. We stand by our conviction that the recycled article was a grossly unfair and inaccurate characterization of our work.

Thank you