

To the Honorable Members of the City of Sitka Assembly:

We, the undersigned veterinarians—all licensed in the State of Alaska and residing/have homes in the City of Sitka —write to you with deep concern regarding the recent incident in which six animals were euthanized by gunshot. We understand that City Administrator John Leach stated these actions adhered to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals. However, we respectfully disagree with that conclusion and believe the guidelines were not properly followed.

The **AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals (2020)**¹ specify that the use of firearms is acceptable only under very limited circumstances—generally in emergencies or field conditions where no other humane option is feasible. Within a shelter setting, where trained personnel, chemical euthanasia, and veterinary resources are typically available, gunshot is not recommended nor considered a best practice. The guidelines specifically state, “Gunshot should not be used for routine euthanasia of animals in animal control situations, such as municipal pounds or shelters”.

The **Association of Shelter Veterinarians’ Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters (2022)** states that “While necessary in rare occasions in the field, gunshot is unacceptable as a routine method for euthanasia of dogs, cats, or other small companion animals.”² As veterinarians dedicated to animal health and welfare, we can confirm that the methods detailed in the recent investigative report do not align with what the AVMA deems appropriate for companion animals in a controlled environment.

Moreover, none of us were contacted for consultation or assistance prior to this decision. Had local veterinary expertise been consulted, a more humane outcome could have been achieved, and this distressing event might have been avoided.

We hold deep respect for the role of police in public safety. However, expecting law enforcement officers to be solely responsible for euthanizing animals—especially in non-emergency situations—places them in a difficult position for which they are not specifically trained. This poses risks to animal welfare, erodes public trust, and can undermine the professional standards of care that our community should expect.

¹ AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals, 2020 ed: American Veterinary Medical Association, Schaumburg, IL, USA, 2020

² Association of Shelter Veterinarians. Position statement: Euthanasia of shelter animals. 2020. Accessed Dec 13, 2022.

Citation: Journal of Shelter Medicine and Community Animal Health 2022 - <http://dx.doi.org/10.56771/ASVguidelines.202254> ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters <https://www.sheltervet.org/assets/docs/position-statements/euthanasiaofshelteranimals.pdf>.

We respectfully request that the Assembly:

1. **Review and revise existing policies and procedures** governing euthanasia at the Sitka Animal Shelter to align with AVMA guidelines and current industry best practices.
2. **Require consultation with a licensed veterinarian** for all shelter-related euthanasia decisions, except in clearly defined emergency situations.
3. **Provide adequate funding and resources** to ensure the shelter can employ suitably trained personnel, maintain proper facilities, and institute professional oversight of animal care.
4. **Clearly define the roles** of law enforcement and animal control to prevent scenarios where untrained individuals must make complex medical or animal welfare decisions.
5. **Update Sitka Municipal Code** to reflect the changes listed above, as appropriate.

Our intention is not to assign blame, but rather to safeguard our community's animals by upholding higher standards of care. With appropriate resources, professional guidance, and clear protocols, we believe Sitka can and should avoid incidents like this in the future.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to the well-being of animals in Sitka. We remain willing to assist in the development of improved protocols and to offer further guidance as needed.

Sincerely,

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