



November 8, 2021

Dear Council Members,

On behalf of Friends Montgomery County Animals (FMCA), I'm writing to express support for Bill 37-21 to establish a new County Animal Services Advisory Committee.

FMCA was founded in 1974, and we have a long history of interacting with the county shelter. During the years shelter operations were under contract, we were frustrated by the shelter's high level of animal euthanasia and lack of collaboration with nonprofit organizations. Since management reverted to the county, we've seen much improvement in these areas and others.

We've been especially impressed with the progress at the county shelter since executive director Tom Koenig's arrival in 2015. His leadership team and staff's willingness to partner with local and national nonprofits, agencies, and other stakeholders to advance our shared goals has been evident in several projects and initiatives and is the reason we are happy to support the shelter in any way we can, including by serving on an advisory committee.

As one example, in 2016, Mr. Koenig spearheaded a pilot project to proactively address a major source of cat overpopulation in our county. That project led to the formation of the nonprofit Montgomery County Community Cat Coalition (MCC3), which has since sterilized and vaccinated thousands of community cats. The coalition has brought much needed structure and resources to trap-neuter-return efforts in our county, strengthened relationships among animal welfare groups, and reduced the number of cats and kittens flowing into the shelter.

More recently, in 2020, when MCASAC was forced to close its doors to adopters under a state mandate to prevent the spread of COVID-19, shelter staff reached out to FMCA to figure out how we could facilitate adoptions while maintaining safe social-distancing for the people involved. As a result, 148 dogs and cats were placed in homes.

Montgomery County has made significant strides on the animal welfare front in recent years, including dramatically improved live-release rates (FY2021-92%) at the county shelter. Much of that can be credited to Mr. Koenig's leadership.

At the same time, we have plenty of animal welfare challenges that could benefit from a collaboration between the county and local nonprofits. The most pressing concern when it comes to pet overpopulation in this county, is the lack of affordable spay/neuter services. Existing low-cost spay/neuter programs in our area are woefully inadequate for a county of over a million residents. Rescue organizations such as ours are forced to travel to adjacent counties to access their nonprofit high-volume spay/neuter clinics. For Montgomery County residents in underserved neighborhoods who lack reliable transportation and internet access, as well as those whose first language isn't


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English, getting pets sterilized is a herculean task. This is a decades-old problem that has reached a critical state since the pandemic.

As Mr. Koenig demonstrated when he brought together a coalition to address community cat issues, we can make significant progress when local humane organizations and agencies combine their expertise and collaborate on common goals. We welcome the formation of a County Animal Services Advisory Committee to advance animal welfare and serve the residents of Montgomery County.

Thank you for your time and attention to this letter. Please feel free to contact me if you have any question or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda McMakin".

Linda McMakin

President

Friends of Montgomery County Animals, Inc.

P.O. Box 386, Germantown, MD 20875
(301) 977-4833 • info@fmca.org
www.fmca.org • facebook.com/fmcainfo
501(c)(3) Tax EIN #23-7370815