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Subject: SFDOG opposes the proposal to eliminate the Commission on Animal Control and Welfare
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Dear Commission Streamlining Task Force,

This statement is submitted on behalf of the San Francisco Dog Owners Group (SFDOG)—the largest citywide organization advocating for responsible dog ownership and off-leash recreational opportunities for people with dogs.

SFDOG strongly opposes the proposal to eliminate the Commission on Animal Control and Welfare (CACW) and urges the Commission Streamlining Task Force to reconsider this misguided recommendation.

The Commission on Animal Control and Welfare Is Essential for Humane, Accountable Policy

Eliminating the CACW reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose and value. The Commission plays a vital role in ensuring that San Francisco’s animal-related policies remain humane, transparent, and publicly accountable.

Far from being outdated, the CACW serves as the City’s only independent voice devoted entirely to animal welfare and ethical standards in animal control and policy.

Indeed, every major improvement in the City’s treatment of animals has benefited from the Commission’s informed, ethical, and community-centered guidance.

History makes this clear: the Commission was established in response to public concern and complaints about contracted animal control services—concerns that demanded independent oversight and accountability. That need is as urgent today as ever.

1. Independent Oversight Can’t Come from Within

The Department of Animal Care and Control (ACC) performs essential operational work—but it cannot credibly evaluate its own performance.

Eliminating the Commission would erase the only independent check on how ACC carries out its duties. The CACW ensures that both the public—and the animals affected—have a voice outside the department’s hierarchy.

2. Leadership in Action

The CACW recently played a key leadership role in exposing serious problems at the San Francisco Zoo.

Following the Commission's investigation and its support for the 2024 Animal Welfare Advisors' Report—which documented unsafe, outdated conditions—the Board of Supervisors ordered a full audit of the Zoo. Major outlets including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, NBC Bay Area, KTVU, and SFGATE reported on the findings.

This outcome shows precisely why the Commission matters: its independent oversight brought long-ignored issues to light and drove accountability that otherwise would not have occurred.

It's a real-world example of the Commission's importance—protecting animal welfare, ensuring transparency, and prompting action when it was most needed.

3. The Review Process Has Been Superficial and Lacks Expertise

It is troubling that the Task Force's review follows a one-size-fits-all template, with little understanding of animal welfare policy.

No interviews with current or former commissioners, community stakeholders, or members of the public have been conducted. Reviewers haven't attended meetings or examined the Commission's work in depth.

As a result, their conclusions rely on attendance statistics rather than substance, overlooking the Commission's meaningful work. A credible review must include those directly involved; otherwise, it fails the very standards of transparency it is meant to promote.

4. Public Engagement Isn't Redundant—It's Democracy in Action

The Task Force dismisses Commission meetings as repetitive or sparsely attended, but that misses the point.

The CACW provides an accessible, public forum where residents, veterinarians, and advocates can raise concerns that might otherwise go unheard.

Animal issues—from feral cat management to live animal markets—intersect with public health, environmental ethics, and equity. Without the Commission, there would be no public venue for transparent discussion.

Reducing it to a token advisory body would silence public input and undermine humane policymaking.

5. The Commission Strengthens, Not Duplicates, City Functions

The CACW's work complements ACC's—it doesn't duplicate it. While ACC enforces regulations and runs programs, the Commission identifies gaps, highlights emerging issues, and connects community voices with policymakers.

Commission initiatives—such as improving feral cat management, reviewing live animal market conditions, and developing humane best-practice recommendations—address issues beyond ACC's immediate mandate.

The Commission's early attention to problems helps the City prevent crises and uphold ethical standards.

6. Resource Strain Makes Oversight Even More Important

ACC's recent reduction of public hours on Mondays shows the department is already stretched thin.

When resources are limited, independent oversight becomes even more critical. The Commission provides continuity, accountability, and public participation precisely when departments must narrow their focus to daily operations.

Expecting ACC to absorb the Commission's public engagement, oversight, and policy functions under these conditions is neither feasible nor responsible.

7. Eliminating the Commission Saves Nothing

The Commission has no staff and no budget. Removing it won't save meaningful money.

The minimal administrative support it requires is negligible compared with the oversight and transparency it delivers—or with the budgets of other City commissions.

No other body addresses animal welfare. Eliminating the CACW would not improve efficiency; it would erase the only forum for humane policy dialogue.

8. The Commission Supports the Board of Supervisors

Without the Commission, animal-related complaints and policy issues would flow directly to the Board of Supervisors, overwhelming their offices.

The CACW filters and refines public input, turning raw concerns into informed recommendations. Removing it wouldn't reduce workload—it would simply shift it upward.

9. Strengthen the Commission—Don't Scrap It

Vacancies and uneven participation are administrative challenges, not reasons for elimination. Clearer appointment criteria and active recruitment can resolve them.

The Commission's mix of citizen volunteers and City department representatives ensures balanced, informed policymaking. Dissolving it would cut off the voices of those most affected by animal policy.

10. Humane Governance Requires an Ethical Compass

The Commission represents the City's commitment to compassion and responsible governance. Eliminating it would send the wrong message—that animal welfare and public oversight no longer matter.

At a time of growing awareness of animal ethics, biodiversity, and the link between animal and human health, this would be a step backward.

Animal welfare demands accountability, not abandonment—and the public deserves a seat at the table, not a closed door.

Save the Commission on Animal Control and Welfare

Instead of dismantling the Commission, the City should modernize and strengthen it—clarify its mission, improve appointments, and deepen collaboration with ACC and related departments.

The Task Force’s recommendation, based on an incomplete review, risks silencing the City’s only independent, humane, and public voice for animal welfare oversight.

SFDOG urges you to save the Commission on Animal Control and Welfare. Protecting animals and supporting responsible pet owners requires independent oversight—please keep that voice alive.

Sincerely,

David Emanuel

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cc: President, San Francisco Board of Supervisors