

AfDA's Survey for DeKalb CEO Candidates

About This Survey - Please Read



Members of Advocates for DeKalb Animals are asking each CEO candidate to complete this survey. Your answers will inform voters on your positions regarding critical animal welfare issues. Survey answers will be summarized and presented to voters via our website, www.advocatesfordekalbanimals.com and other media channels. [Surveys must be completed by March 29th, 11:45 PM EDT.](#)

This survey is broken into four parts: 1) Animal Population and Shelter Size, 2) Breeding and Population Control, 3) Animal Services and Community Support, and 4) Animals in Court Cases. For each part, we will provide data and information on recent trends in problems facing Dekalb County followed by approaches AfDA has identified as broadly addressing the described issues. You will then be prompted to indicate your commitment to addressing these through AfDA's proposed solutions. Please note that commitments made via this survey will be used by AfDA going forward to assess your success in implementing said solutions, should you be elected. Each section will allow you opportunity to write in more long form answers and nuance to survey answers including space to provide your own ideas.

If you have questions about any aspect of this survey or require technical assistance, please immediately reach out to AfDA, dekalbadvocates@gmail.com.

AfDA's Survey for DeKalb CEO Candidates

General Information

* 1. What is your first and last name?

* 2. We understand that candidates might want to run through the survey to acquaint themselves with the data, information, questions, and answers. Since all survey questions require an answer, we are offering candidates the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the survey ahead of final submission. Please indicate below if you are currently running through the survey to familiarize yourself with it, or completing your final submission.

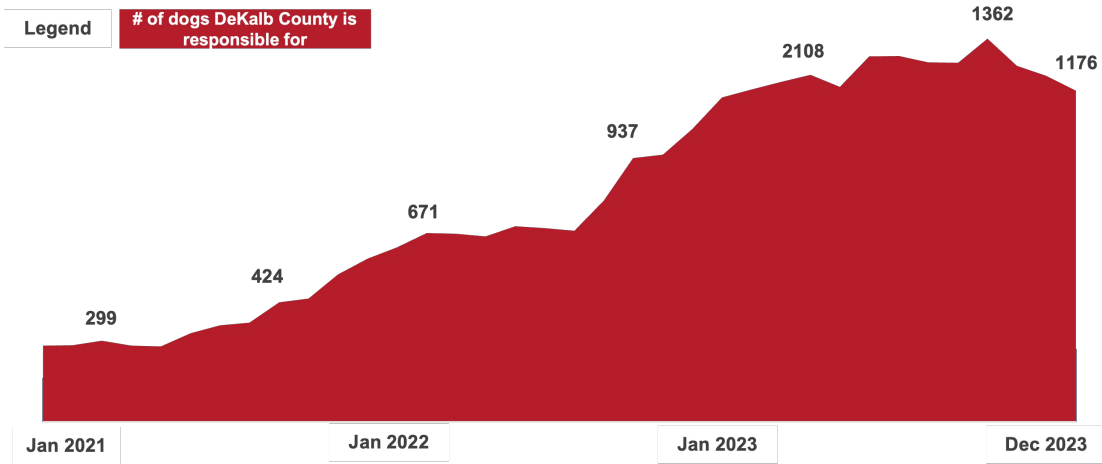
- I am familiarizing myself with the survey and **will take it again** to submit final answers
- This is my **final survey submission**

AfDA's Survey for DeKalb CEO Candidates

Animal Population and Shelter Size

For the past decade, DeKalb County Animal Services has taken in an average of **8,000 animals per year**. While the majority of these animals are stray cats and dogs, **dogs** account for approximately **70%** of all animals DeKalb County is managing at any given time. In just the past two years, the **number of dogs DeKalb County is housing, feeding, and providing medical care for has increased dramatically.**

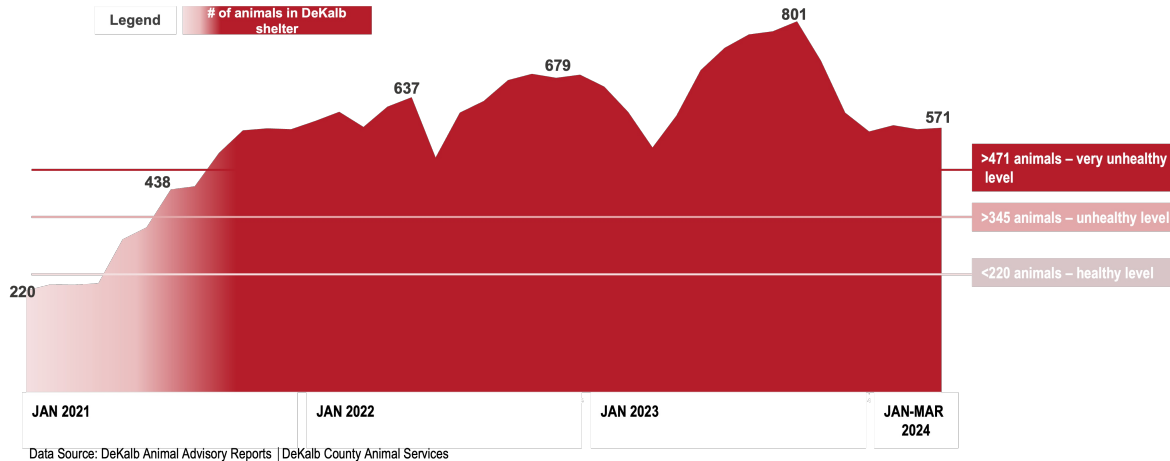
DeKalb County is **Responsible for More Dogs** Over Time (2021-2023)



Data Source: Government Shelter Data Reporting | Georgia Department of Agriculture

Due to these increases in recent years, DeKalb County's **existing shelter is experiencing severe overcrowding.**

DeKalb County Shelter Operating at **Very Unhealthy Population** Levels for Years (2021-2023)



DeKalb County's population is **expected to reach 1 million people by 2050**. Given trends in intake, this would mean Dekalb County Animal Services could expect to take in **11,000 animals per year** by 2050 (a conservative estimate), and close to **9,000 just a few years from now**.

What's more, when polled by Maddie's Fund in 2022, **66%** of surveyed **DeKalb residents** reported that public officials should **increase public funding for the shelter**.

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Animal Population and Shelter Size

* 3. How committed are you to expanding the current shelter to accommodate current and future needs during your term?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

For the following questions, please indicate your level of commitment to **completing each task *during your elected term***.

* 4. **Expansion of Shelter**

Hire a licensed architect/architectural firm, with a successful track record of building right-sized, life-saving, no-kill animal shelters based on capacity needs.

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 5. **Expansion of Shelter**

Collect input, and assure its use in expansion plans, from Animal Services staff and volunteers, the DeKalb Animal Advisory Board, as well as the wider community.

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 6. **Expansion of Shelter**

Use the designated \$7.5 million SPLOST II funds, and secure whatever additional amount is needed to complete the expansion.

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 7. **Expansion of the Shelter - Timeline**

What is your timeline for **completing the expanded shelter** for DeKalb County?

- In first year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to complete this during my term

* 8. **Expansion of the Shelter - Other**

Please use this area to explain any of your answers to shelter expansion questions. Please also add any thoughts you have for addressing shelter overcrowding not mentioned above - we want to hear your ideas. If you have nothing to add, please put "N/a."

* 9. **Temporary Space for Emergency Use**

How committed are you to securing temporary space to accommodate current space needs?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low commitment

* 10. **Temporary Space for Emergency Use**

What is your timeline for securing temporary space to accommodate current needs once elected?

- Within 1-2 months
- Within 6 months
- Within 1 year
- 2+ years
- I do not expect to secure temporary space during my term

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Breeding and Population Control

DeKalb's current animal crisis is driven by many factors and, undoubtedly, the **most important** is **a lack of population control measures**. Between 2017 and 2022, approximately **42%** of all dogs entering the shelter were **under one year old**. **Additionally, 80%** of all dogs entering the shelter in this time period were **unaltered** (i.e., had not been spayed or neutered), equaling **22,223 unaltered dogs**. Using a very conservative estimate, this number of unaltered dogs would have accounted for a staggering **3.1 million more dogs** entering the community from 2017 and onward.

Between 2017 and 2022, Dekalb County Enforcement documented **1,262 cases** referencing **suspected breeding activity**. Oftentimes, these reports contain other references to **neglect**, hoarding, or other cruelty, including dog-fighting. While dogs are often the targets of these breeding and fighting operations, they are not the only animal victims.



30 dogs seized from Lithonia properties in animal cruelty case, police say

By FOX 5 Atlanta Digital Team and Brittany Edney | Published May 2, 2023 | Updated May 4, 2023 | Lithonia | FOX 5 Atlanta



The Atlanta Journal-Constitution News

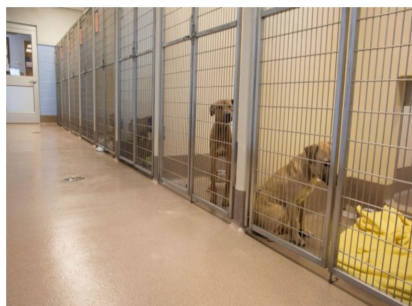


79 cats seized in 3 DeKalb hoarding cases



Dogfighting ring busted

January 10, 2018 | Horace Holloman | 0 Comments | DeKalb County, dogfighting, Jason Gagnon, Karen Hirsch, Lifenine Animal Project's DeKalb County animal shelter



Foster homes needed

CRIME & PUBLIC SAFETY

Raid: Doctor was hoarding hundreds of live and dead birds



Many of the birds were dead when officials showed up.

A DeKalb County husband and wife were recently charged with dogfighting after officials received complaints of suspicious activity at a residence at 421 Cedar Grove Place in Ellenwood.

According to DeKalb County detective Jason Gagnon, two people were charged with dogfighting and police are searching for another. Chaketa Williams, 37, and her husband Willie Dasher, 45, were charged with dogfighting and appeared in court Jan. 5.

Police are still searching for Christopher Austin, 47.

Compilation of news clippings about criminal activities against DeKalb animals in recent years.

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Breeding and Animal Population

For the following questions, please indicate your **level of commitment to completing each task *during your elected term***.

* 11. **Strengthen Ordinances**

How committed are you to strengthening local ordinances to reduce and prevent homeless, neglected, and abused animals?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low commitment

* 12. **Strengthening Ordinances - Breeding**

How committed are you to ensuring the passage and enforcement of a new breeding and sales regulation?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low commitment

* 13. **Strengthening Ordinances - Spay and Neuter**

How committed are you to mandating and enforcing a new spay or neuter requirement with pet registration?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low commitment

* 14. **Strengthening Ordinances - County Animal Advocate**

How committed are you to establishing an Animal Advocate for the County's impounded animals?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low commitment

* 15. **Strengthening Ordinances - County Animal Advocate**

How committed are you to establishing an Animal Disposition Hearing process to reduce the number animals impounded for court cases and reduce their shelter stay?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low commitment

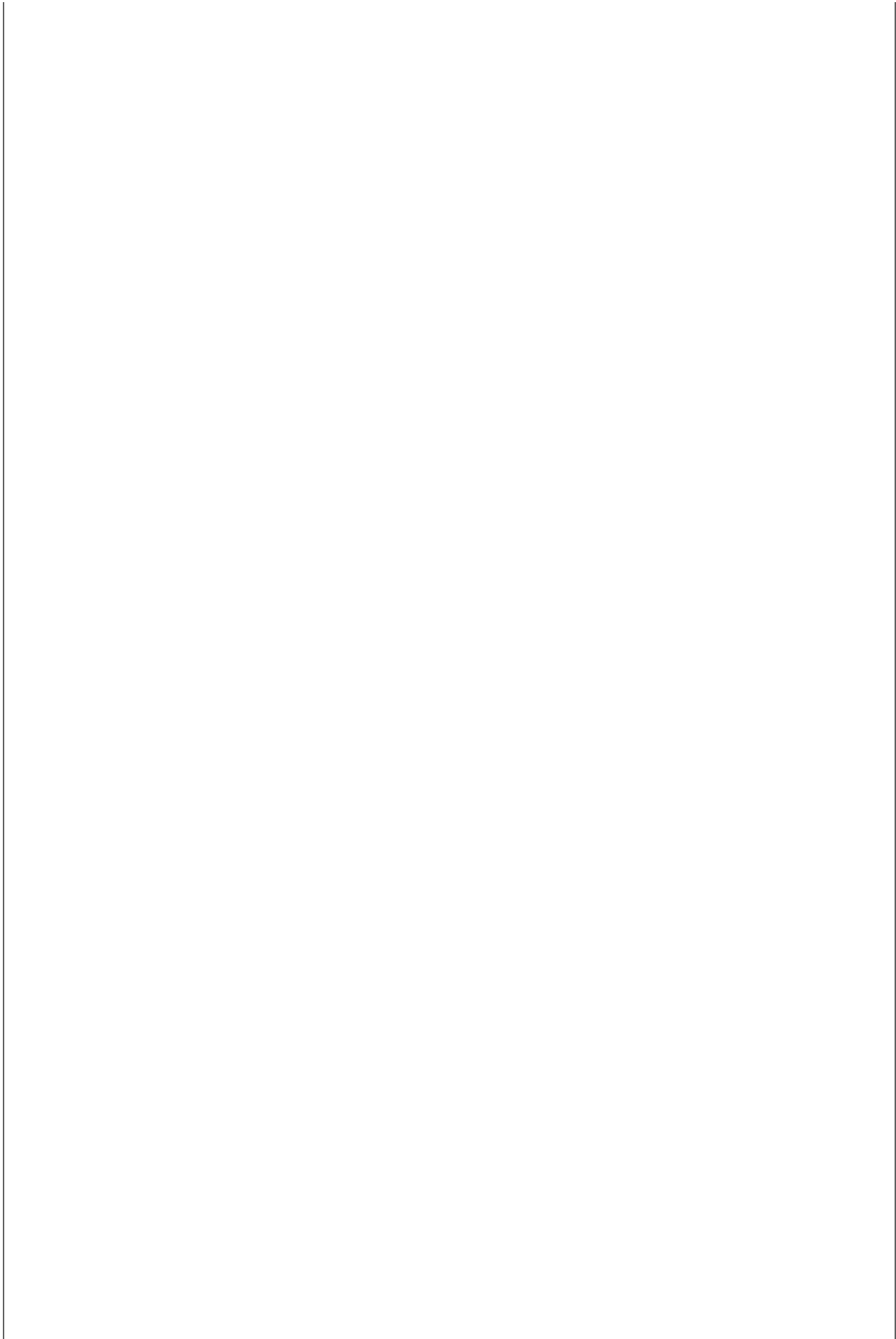
* 16. **Strengthening Ordinances - Timeline**

What is your timeline for passing a new breeding and sales regulation as well as a spay and neuter requirement with pet registrations, once elected?

- In the first year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to pass these ordinances during my term

* 17. **Breeding and Population Control - Other**

Please use this area to explain any of your answers to breeding and population control questions. Please add any thoughts you have for addressing overpopulation not mentioned above - we want to hear your ideas. If you have nothing to add, please put "N/a."

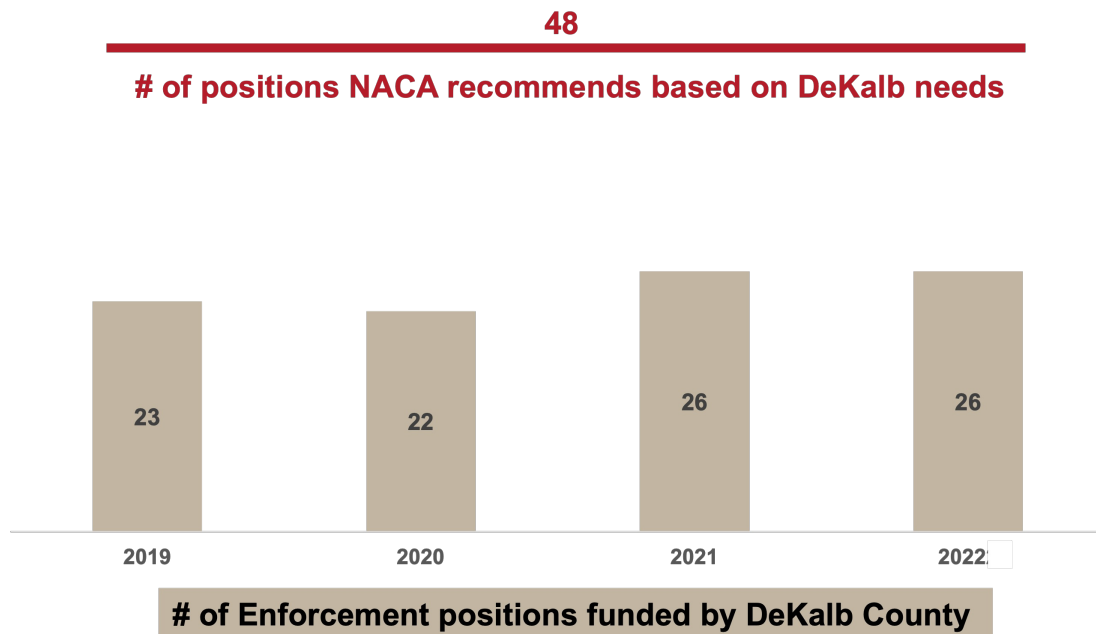


AfDA's Survey for DeKalb CEO Candidates

Animal Services and Community Support

Retention, training, and compensation of all animal services staff are major factors affecting the County's overall effectiveness in addressing this daily crisis. Unfortunately, DeKalb County Animal Enforcement has been **understaffed** for many years. The most recent records indicate **50%** of all positions are **unfilled**, with a **staff turnover rate** of **62%**. Even if all positions were filled, Animal Enforcement would still be at staffing **half** the levels **recommended** by the **National Animal Care and Control Association**.

Enforcement Positions **Severely Underfunded** by Dekalb County



Data Source: DeKalb County Animal Services

These trends coupled with high calls for Enforcement -- in January 2024, Enforcement answered **952 calls, a record number** for this time of year -- have created an untenable situation. What's more, the position of **Enforcement Director has remained unfilled for 7 years**. This has led to years of disorganized processes and a lack of policies that go on to hurt our communities and animals, e.g., unresponsive to field calls, untrained or unsupervised work, and poor record-keeping that leave animals at-risk for being returned to abusers. Indeed, DeKalb's Office of Independent Internal Audit [released findings in 2020](#) outlining just these very issues, and additional details about critical training deficiencies. It should be noted that this audit was published just one year after two [POST](#)-certified officers were transferred out of Animal Services, significantly

reducing in-house investigative expertise and capacity.

For the following questions related to **strengthening enforcement**, please indicate your level of commitment to **completing each task *during your elected term***.

* 18. **Strengthening Enforcement - Staffing Levels**

What is your level of commitment to budgeting and filling enforcement positions commensurate with NACA standards?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 19. **Strengthening Enforcement - Hiring a Director**

What is your level of commitment to filling the Director position with someone skilled and experienced in life-saving, animal law, supervision of subordinates, and community-based policing?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 20. **Strengthening Enforcement - POST Certified Staff**

What is your level of commitment to employing two POST certified officers to investigate and make charges related to neglect and cruelty, as well as provide training for all officers on record keeping and building strong cases?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 21. **Strengthening Enforcement - Training Staff**

What is your level of commitment to increasing training of field officers to improve skills related to bringing owners into compliance with local animal ordinances and state law?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 22. **Strengthening Enforcement - Life-saving Standard Operating Procedures**

What is your level of commitment to developing, implementing, and training all staff on a life-saving, public health and safety-based SOP Manual and System?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 23. **Strengthening Enforcement - Director Timeline**

What is your timeline for filling the Enforcement Director position?

- In the first year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to fill the Enforcement Director during my term

* 24. **Strengthening Enforcement - Staffing Timeline**

What is your timeline for funding enforcement positions. (i.e., increasing the staff numbers) commensurate with NACA standards once elected, and hiring two POST-certified staff?

- In the first year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to complete these staffing tasks during my term

* 25. **Strengthening Enforcement - Training Timeline**

What is your timeline for ensuring all enforcement staff have received adequate training on bringing owners into compliance with local animal ordinances and state law?

- In the first year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to ensure this training during my term

* 26. **Strengthening Enforcement - Other**

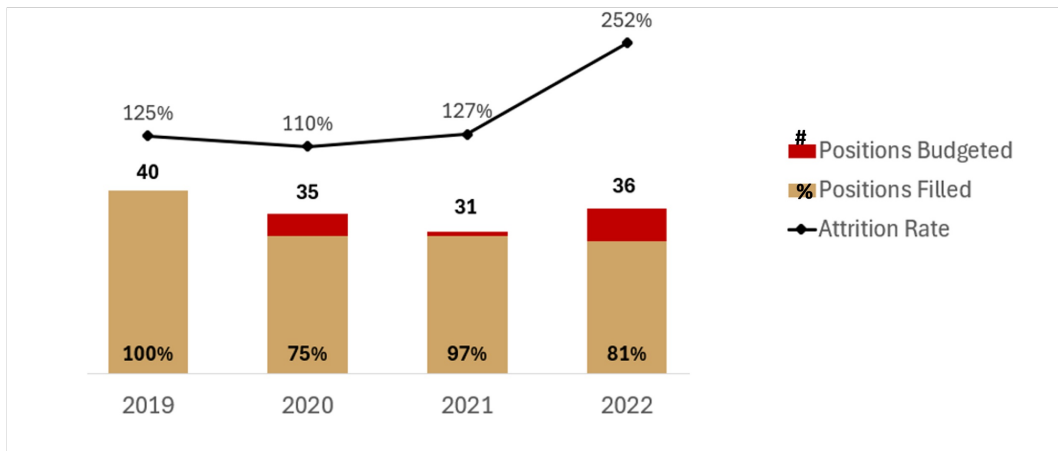
Please use this area to explain any of your answers to strengthening enforcement questions. Also, please add any thoughts you have for strengthening enforcement not mentioned above - we want to hear your ideas. If you have nothing to add, please put "N/a."

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Animal Services and Community Support

Similar to Enforcement, years of unfilled and underfunded positions have led to dramatic turnover among shelter staff. [Workforce data](#) released by The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement shows a median turnover rate of 38% among similar staff types. When looking at those tasked with direct care of animals in our DeKalb shelters, we see much higher turnover rates.

DeKalb County Shelter Experiences Staggering Turnover of Animal Care Staff



Several factors could explain these trends, including having too few positions funded to share the workload. According to the National Animal Control Association, DeKalb County's current shelter staffing levels **are less than half** of what they should be. And, if current trends continue unabated (e.g., lack of population control), the animal care staff numbers we need will only continue to grow.

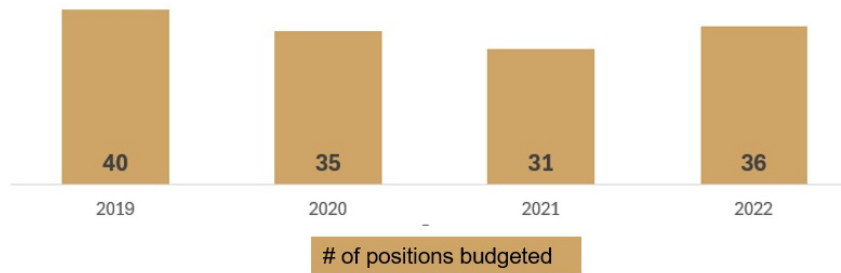
Animal Care Positions **Severely Underfunded*** by DeKalb County

Minimum # of positions needed if few to no solutions are in place

78

Minimum # of positions needed if other solutions are in place

49



*Based on NACA Standards

Additionally, current animal care staff are paid a starting wage of \$16/hour, while the [cost of living](#) in Atlanta, Georgia imputes a minimum wage of \$26/hour. Animal care workers are often exposed to trauma through their work and report or experience higher rates of job-related mental illness such as occupational stress, and PTSD, as well as suicide.^{1, 2, 3} Indeed, a study conducted and released in 2023 revealed that shelter workers report levels of compassion fatigue comparable to ER nurses during COVID, first responders to Ebola and veterinarians.⁴ And, yet, shelter worker compensation is dramatically lower than those working in said professions.

1. Andrukonis, A., & Protopopova, A. (2020). Occupational health of animal shelter employees by live release rate, shelter type, and euthanasia-related decision. *Anthrozoös*, 33(1), 119-131.
2. Tiesman, H. M., Konda, S., Hartley, D., Menéndez, C. C., Ridenour, M., & Hendricks, S. (2015). Suicide in US workplaces, 2003–2010: A comparison with non-workplace suicides. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 48(6), 674-682.
3. Scotney, R. L., McLaughlin, D., & Keates, H. L. (2015). A systematic review of the effects of euthanasia and occupational stress in personnel working with animals in animal shelters, veterinary clinics, and biomedical research facilities. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 247(10), 1121-1130.
4. Wolf, P. J., Gillespie, M., & Data, E. (2023). A study of US animal shelter staff well-being.

For the following questions related to improving shelter staffing, please indicate your level of commitment to **completing each task *during your elected term***.

* 27. **Improving Shelter Staff Pay**

What is your level of commitment to conducting a compensation study on shelter workers in DeKalb County and publishing findings on appropriate pay?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 28. **Improving Shelter Staffing Levels**

What is your level of commitment to budgeting and filling shelter positions commensurate with NACA standards?

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

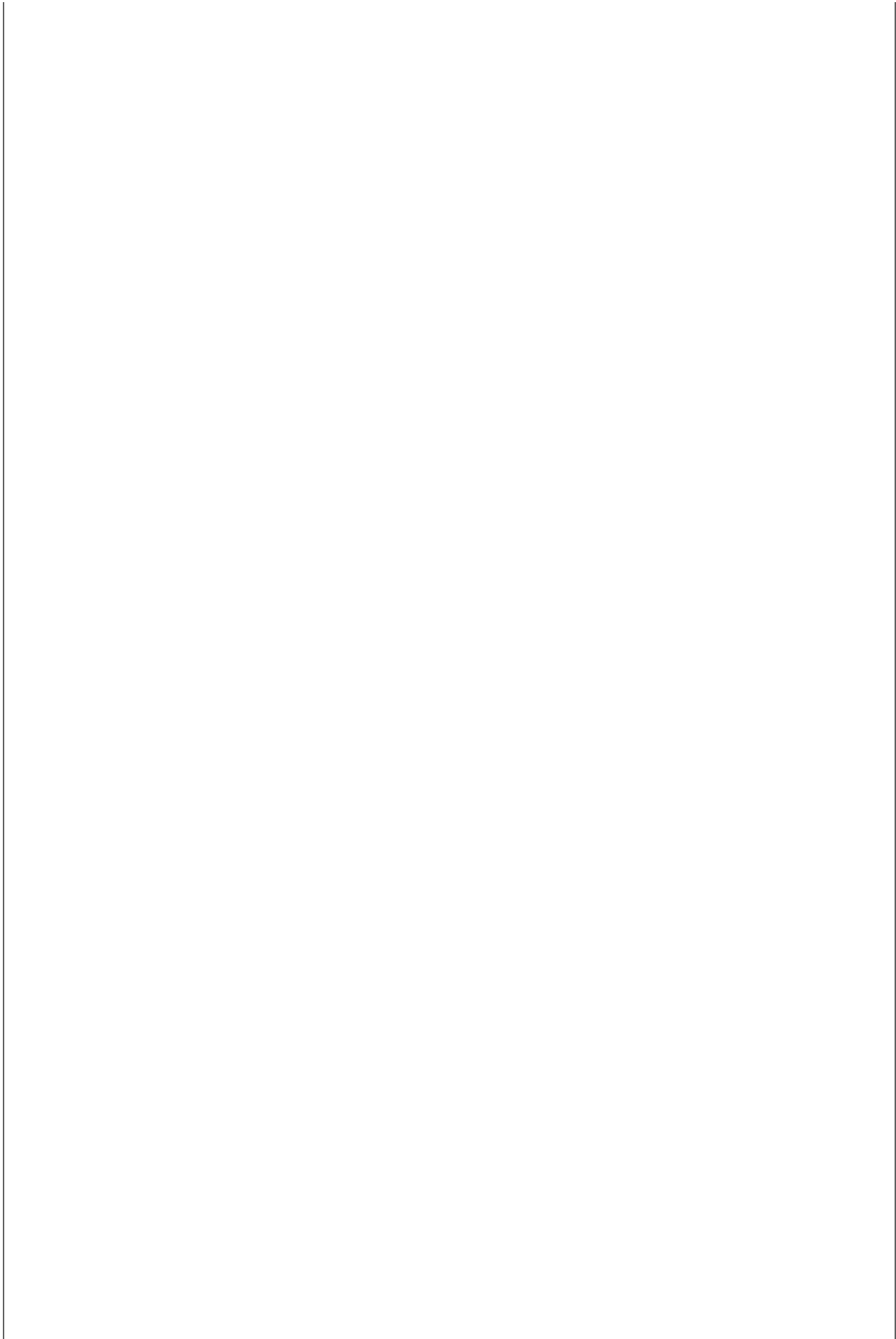
* 29. **Improving Shelter Staffing Levels - Timeline**

What is your timeline for funding shelter staff positions commensurate with NACA standards and with pay informed by the compensation study's results, once elected?

- Within one year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to increase shelter staffing levels and pay in accordance with NACA and a compensation study during my term

* 30. **Improving Shelter Staffing - Other**

Please use this area to explain any of your answers to shelter staffing questions. Also, please add any thoughts you have for improving shelter staffing not mentioned above - we want to hear your ideas. If you have nothing to add, please put "N/a."

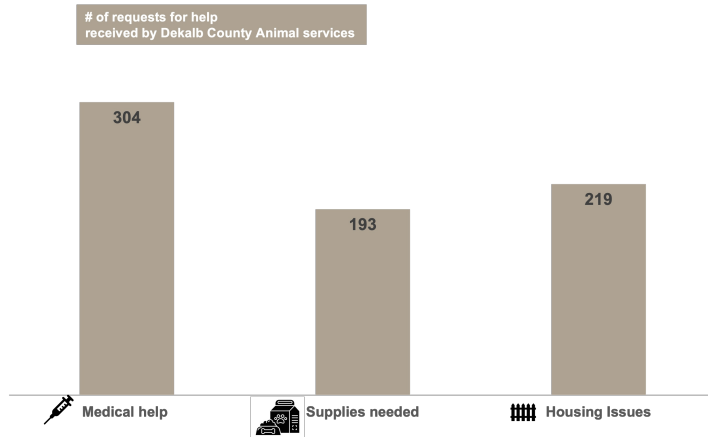


AfDA's Survey for DeKalb CEO Candidates

Animal Services and Community Support

Providing the community with ways to keep and care for their pets is another essential tool we have in helping DeKalb animals. Existing data indicates that our residents require additional support to keep their animal family members together. In recent years, DeKalb County Animal Services has received **hundreds of requests** to help with things like **medicine** and **vet care**, **housing**, and **supplies**.

DeKalb Residents **Need Help** to Keep Their Animal Family Members (2017-2022)



In 2022, when surveyed by Maddie's Fund, **72% of surveyed DeKalb residents** wanted but **could not afford** access to things like **pet food, veterinary care, microchipping**, as well as pet **behavior** and **education training**. As additional **20%** wanted but could not afford a **fence repair** or **replacement** for their animal(s).

For the following questions, please indicate your level of **commitment to completing each task *during your elected term*** related to **financial, logistical, and communications support for...**

* 31. **Pop-up veterinary services**

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 32. **Spay/neuter, microchipping, vaccinations, etc.**

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 33. **Pet food and supply bank(s)**

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 34. **Fencing and outdoor pet shelters**

- Very high commitment
- High commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 35. **Community Resources - Timeline**

What is your timeline for providing financial, logistical, and communications support for ongoing programs to increase access to all resources listed above (e.g., food banks, vet care etc)?

- Within one year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to provide this support during my term.

* 36. **Community Resources - Other**

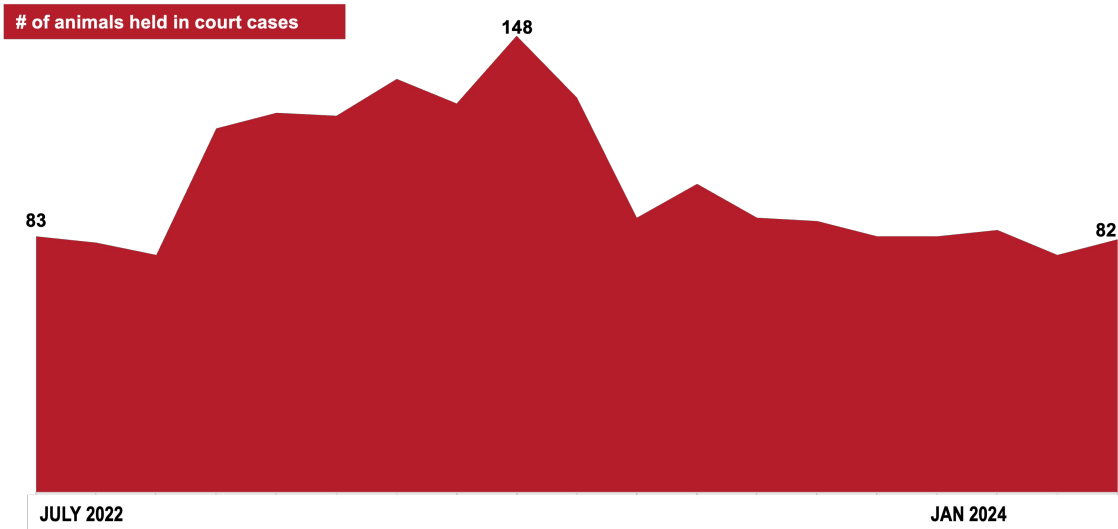
Please use this area to explain any of your answers to questions about increasing access to community resources for animals. Also, please add any thoughts you have for improving access to community resources not mentioned above - we want to hear your ideas. If you have nothing to add, please put "N/a."

AfDA's Survey for DeKalb CEO Candidates

Animals in Court Cases

Animals held for court cases are an often overlooked, but [increasingly noticed](#), special population within DeKalb County Animal Services. A recent investigation by [11Alive News](#) found that DeKalb County is holding 7-10 times more dogs for court than other metropolitan counties like Gwinnett and Fulton.

DeKalb County is Often Holding **Near or Over 100 Animals** for Court Cases on Any Given Month



Data Source: DeKalb Animal Services Advisory Reports | DeKalb County Animal Services

In a presentation provided by DeKalb's Animal Advisory Board to Commissioners last Summer the consequences for this backlog of animals became clear: dogs held for court cases spend an average of **329 days** in the system (and often, the shelter) and **cost the taxpayers millions of dollars**.

Additionally, AfDA's own court case team (a dedicated group of volunteers who attend nearly all hearings involving animals) recently provided their assessment of common issues plaguing justice for animals:

- The victims of cruelty and neglect, their status and condition, the extensive length they are confined in the shelter, and the significant, additional harm done to them under the "idea that they are held as evidence" are rarely considered by any player in the judiciary as cases drag on and on.
- Prosecutors are often unable to provide basic, critical information pertinent to cases, e.g., status and number of animals involved, witnesses that are available to testify, evidence developed by law enforcement, evidence documented in the shelter intake and medical records, and case history.
- Animal Control Officers who have developed the charges and are the best-informed witnesses to a case are often not called to testify or brief the prosecutors before the prosecutors negotiate a reduced plea or drop charges altogether.

- Prosecutors will often hold animals that are the victim of cruelty indefinitely even though the animals themselves are never used as evidence. Photos, videos, witnesses, and law enforcement officers provide testimony as evidence.
- There is a lack of willingness, urgency, coordination, and communication between the County Attorney and prosecutors to implement solutions to reduce the length of stay provided in Georgia law.
- With some frequency, defendants fail to appear multiple times when subpoenaed and experience no consequences. Failure to appear usually results in case resets and delays leaving the victims stuck in a small kennel in the shelter for months and even years. This pattern can lead to cases being dead docketed, effectively dropped.
- While it is difficult for lay observers to evaluate whether decisions have a basis in law or are a function of judicial discretion, several cases appear to have been decided on the crocodile tears of the defendant who, like someone accused of domestic violence, is very sorry and will never do it again. Meanwhile, the voice of the abused animals and, often, the facts of the case are not heard.
- Overall, animals abused by their owners are often not protected by the elected officials whose job it is to protect them. **DeKalb County has multiple repeat offenders of animal abuse.**

* 37. What is your level of commitment to reduce the stay of all court-held animals, particularly dogs, during your term?

- Very high commitment
- High Commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 38. **Court-held Animals - Owner Surrender**

What is your level of commitment to establishing policies encouraging surrender by owner in the field and shelter?

- Very high commitment
- High Commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 39. **Court-held Animals - Hearing Process**

What is your level of commitment to establishing a hearing process to determine disposition and release of animal(s) during court processes?

- Very high commitment
- High Commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 40. **Court-held Animals - Protocol to Reduce Impoundment**

What is your level of commitment to utilizing a stray animal protocol for length of impoundment prior to release of court case animals? This would be when the owners do not contact shelter after notice of impoundment.

- Very high commitment
- High Commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 41. **Court-held Animals - Partnership with Prosecutors**

What is your level of commitment to developing a partnership with prosecutors to utilize all options to release animals?

- Very high commitment
- High Commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low commitment

* 42. **Court-held Animals - Motion to Dispose and Costs of Care**

What is your level of commitment to developing a policy to use Motion to Dispose and Costs of Care in every case where owners fail to appear or delay trial?

- Very high commitment
- High Commitment
- Low commitment
- Very low/no commitment

* 43. **Court-held Animals - Owner Surrender Timeline**

What is your timeline for establishing owner surrender policies?

- Within one year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to establish this support during my term.

* 44. **Court-held Animals - Motion to Dispose and Cost of Care Timeline**

What is your timeline for establishing Motion to Dispose and Cost of Care policies?

- Within one year
- Within two years
- Within my four year term
- I do not expect to establish these policies during my term.

* 45. **Court-held Animals - Other**

Please use this area to explain any of your answers to questions about reducing the stay for court-held animals. Also, please add any thoughts you have for reducing the stay for court-held animals not mentioned above - we want to hear your ideas. If you have nothing to add, please put "N/a."

You have now completed all questions. We appreciate that this survey is not short and asks you to take in a lot of information. On behalf of all the animal lovers, and animals, in DeKalb: ***Thank you***.

Please check our website on April 22nd, www.advocatesfordekalbanimals.com, to review the results of this survey. You can reach us any time at dekalbadvocates@gmail.com.