

## **Introduction:**

Mr. Chairman, Senators.....Good evening. My name is Barbara Nelson and I am the President and CEO of the SPCA Albrecht Center for Animal Welfare here in Aiken. We are a 501c3 non-profit Animal Shelter, Adoption Center, Education and Training Center, and High Volume Spay Neuter Clinic. I would like to thank all of you for the opportunity to speak with you here tonight.

## **SPCA Description:**

We have been incorporated since 1935. Our new facility is 22,000 square feet of state of the art animal living space with 28-30 employees, with additional contract veterinarians and licensed veterinary technicians. It includes an Adoption Center, Education and Training Center, Spay and Neuter Clinic, and a Dog Park complete with swimming pool. It is very popular.

The shelter and this organization are something that this community is proud of. It is a destination for visitors and potential new residents considering the move to Aiken County. Real estate agents tour possible newcomers through our shelter.

It was built with over \$5 million in private funds. We do not receive Government Funding for operations. We rely on private donations, revenue from our 3 Thrift Stores, and what little income we derive from adoption fees, vaccination and grooming revenue.

The SPCA has had a partnership with the City of Aiken for nearly 30 years. The city contracts with the SPCA to house its animal control strays, neglect, and abuse cases as well as provide offices, equipment storage, medical facilities, and administrative functions for the city. In return, the city contributed \$1m to the building of the facility and owns a designated portion. However...The City pays NO operating costs, nor does it subsidize any services. We are solely dependent on our own resourcefulness and quality of service to generate revenue to pay for operating a facility that shows the public that there is an alternative to the traditional thought of hole in wall, barking dogs in cramped, smelly kennels, next to the dump site animal shelter stereotype of the past.

It is part of the SPCA's mission to offer affordable and accessible spaying and neutering and basic health services to the public regardless of income. In addition to sterilization surgery we offer additional services such as Vaccinations, Grooming, Heartworm and FIV testing. We are exploring an internship program with veterinary schools to further vet student education and practice in shelter medicine and sterilization surgery.

Our Education and Training Center is invaluable in exposing youth to the love of companion animals and in offering positive, cutting edge training techniques to dog owners.

Our clinic is subject to the same LLR and DHEC regulations that any veterinary practice would be. We pay sales tax just like everybody else. We have no competitive advantage other than the usual property and corporate tax exemptions that are afforded to a non-profit. Like any other business we would not have a customer base if we did not have good customer service, a clean and healthy facility, compliance with all State and Federal rules and regulations, and a skilled staff.

Our Spay/Neuter Clinic operates under the Humane Alliance Model. That model is cited by the SC Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners as ‘safe harbor’ practice. We have paid to have our Veterinarians and our Licensed Vet Tech complete the Humane Alliance training.

So that is who we are.

### **Animal Welfare Issues:**

**Now for the problem of animal over population and the endless euthanization of perfectly nice adoptable dogs and cats in South Carolina.** There is no doubt that the problem is severe and it is no secret that homeowners who move here are surprised and dismayed by the neglect and rampant homeless strays they see and find.

So what is the solution? To me...it's the carrot and the stick. The SPCA is committed to providing some of the carrots by making sure that sterilization and **basic wellness is affordable and accessible** and **educating our youth**. The stick has to come from local and state government ordinances and laws aimed at encouraging and demanding humane treatment and owner responsibility.

**The passage last session of House Bill 3361 referencing Domestic Violence Pet Protection and the amendment of Senator's Verdin's increased penalties for abuse and neglect was a good start. Putting the worst cases in circuit court for the solicitor's office to prosecute says that South Carolina is taking animal abuse and neglect seriously.**

Perhaps the next step ought to be a statewide requirement that all dogs and cats be **micro-chipped for identification**. This would go a long ways towards identifying ownership of lost, abandoned, and vicious animals that end up in the shelter system or that are a problem for law enforcement. It would not be fool proof or solve everything but it would add another layer of accountability and provide at least some possibility of tracking ownership..

**Shelter and Rescue oversight-** Because there is such an animal welfare problem there are a lot of well meaning people creating rescues and trying to help, BUT there are unscrupulous people who are saying that they are operating a rescue when all they are really doing is dealing in the sale of animals to make some income with total disregard

for their mental or physical health OR they are hiring themselves out to **transport dogs to other states, but not doing it safely**. And there is everything else in between.

Good people who start out trying to help a few dogs, can soon get overwhelmed and find themselves hoarding animals in unhealthy conditions.

Back yard breeders, especially of the small dog variety, frequently house these dogs in cramped, inhumane living conditions. There are a lot of different scenarios that could be avoided by **requiring a business license from commercial breeding operations and setting standards for rescues and shelters**.

Thank you for your time and attention.

### **P.S. Re: Competition among veterinary clinics:**

The business model for veterinary care is changing.

Why...

Because there is an oversupply of vets graduating from schools, burdensome school loans, increasing reliance on expensive technology which they all feel they must buy to keep up with other practices(digital xray, dental xray, ultrasounds, lasers), clients have the choice to buy meds online or inexpensively at Walmart/Target etc, the loss of ‘annual vaccine’ visits because vaccines aren’t always annual anymore, the growth of giant veterinary corporations, vaccine clinics available at pet stores, and shelter/rescues are neutering 100% before adoption(State Law) – and that’s where more and more people are getting their animals.

The blame shouldn’t be directed at non-profits who are operating with high standards and providing affordable and accessible services to people regardless of income. Because of the animal overpopulation problem families don’t have just one dog or cat anymore....they have 5-6 that they probably took in as rescues. That is expensive even for upper income households.

### **Consequences of Limiting Services to Just Low Income Owners:**

- It will send shelters back to the Dark Ages. The other income levels pay more for services. That money is then used to subsidize the services so they are affordable for the low income owner who otherwise wouldn’t be able to care for their animal.
- The statement that.....”Well...if you can’t afford the animal then don’t own it”, may sound good but the facts are that people in rural areas are rescuing multiple homeless animals that just show up in their yards. Even well to do households with multiple pets struggle to afford proper care. And why do people have multiple pets?.... because they see how bad the problem of overpopulation is and that thousands are needlessly dying in shelters and they want to save them.
- Animal shelters cannot make income and expenses meet through adoption fees alone. The reason lots of shelters are filthy, crowded messes is because, even with

minimum wage labor, it is nearly impossible to pay the bills....especially in small towns with large low income populations.

**Rebuttal to Pat Hill, SC Veterinary Association Legislative Chair Editorial:**

In response, I would say that shelters and humane societies were not intended to stop the over population problem. We have gone where the problems led us through the decades. In 1935, our little SPCA offered stainless steel snaffle bits in exchange for rusted bits and leather harness covers to mules and horses. It was not until the 1970-80s that the pet population really became a problem.

I'd venture a guess that the time between 1935 and 1970s, we did a lot of whatever was needed. And so now, too, we must do the same. There is a need for pet care that is more affordable, which is what we intend to provide.

I would anticipate that it will be very much the same as it is with the S/N clinic. In general it will be mostly vouchers and a small percentage of regular paying customers. For Pat Hill to insinuate that the standard of care would not be as high is a slap in the face to her own profession and credentials. Our doctors have the same letters behind their names as she does.