

# REPORTS



SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY  
CIVIL GRAND JURY  
2023





**WHO LET THE DOGS OUT?  
A TAIL IN TWO CITIES**

## SUMMARY

The 2023 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury (Civil Grand Jury, Grand Jury, GJ) has concerns with the increasing reports of dog bites and how they are handled by the animal services departments within San Bernardino County. An investigation was initiated by the Grand Jury and the following report contains the findings of said investigation.

On the morning of October 7, 2022, an elderly woman was walking in the Baldy Mesa area of San Bernardino County when she was attacked by two Dogo Argentino dogs. These animals are muscular, weigh between 80 and 100 pounds and, in the early twentieth century, were bred for dog fighting and hunting large game, such as wild boar.

When deputies arrived to assist, the woman was unresponsive. The 80-year-old had been mauled to death.

The 2023 Grand Jury found that hundreds of people nationwide are bitten or attacked by dogs. Unfortunately, many of the victims are children ([www.Dogsbite.org](http://www.Dogsbite.org)).

Indeed, in a comparison with a city similar in population to San Bernardino, the Grand Jury found San Bernardino with a population of 220,328 had twice as many dog bites as Rancho Cucamonga with a population of 176,336 (US 2020 Census).

Dogs running loose and the number of dog bites have been on the rise in the City of San Bernardino. The San Bernardino City Animal Services Shelter is full of dogs waiting to be picked up by their owners or to be adopted by someone.

Many city residents have sustained bites by stray or loose animals. It is often difficult to find the dogs who bite people, and then locate their owners once a bite happens because:

- the dog runs away
- the owner, in fear of losing his/her dog to Animal Services, refuses to cooperate with the Animal Control Officer (ACO) who is attempting to assist
- the person bitten is not likely to chase after the dog

“Studies conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association have concluded that the most common causes of fatal dog attacks are preventable factors related to irresponsible ownership, abuse and/or neglect and failure to properly supervise large or strong dogs. Most fatalities are usually the result of human controlled factors specific to the circumstances surrounding the incident.” ([www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org))

Bites from dogs are an important public health issue. According to “DogsBite.org”, a research and education nonprofit organization, in the period between 2010 to 2019, there were 369 dog bite fatalities in the US. Five of these fatalities occurred in San Bernardino County. Three of those five were children under the age of three.

Whether in the City of San Bernardino, the County of San Bernardino or nationally, dog bites can lead to death, disfigurement, disability, and infectious diseases such as rabies. In most cases, it is a traumatic experience that can be reduced by a variety of means.

The 2023 Grand Jury investigated the City of San Bernardino Department of Animal Services. For the purpose of this report, the name San Bernardino City Animal Services will be used (SBCAS, Animal Services). The Grand Jury toured and observed the kennels; however, the focus of this investigation centered on Animal Control Officers and Field Services.

Evidence revealed that the public has a misconception of the ACO’s role dealing with safe, healthy, pet ownership. Animal Control Officers are not the “Dog Catcher”. ACOs do not stalk the streets with large nets attached to long poles. The goal of the officer is to intervene and provide public education and safety. They are dedicated and educated animal lovers who have the skills, knowledge and compassion to assist the dog owner in keeping their animals safe, healthy and home for the life of the animal.

In the investigation into SBCAS, the Grand Jury also read documents and interviewed witnesses from Rancho Cucamonga Animal Field Services (RCAFS, RCAS) in order to compare Animal Services of a city of similar population.

## **BACKGROUND**

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, more than 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year in the United States. More than 800,000 of these bites require medical attention, and at least half of those are children. The United States Postal Service reports that the state with the most dog bites against carriers is California. ([www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)) For the City of San Bernardino, the statistics reveal 238 dog bites on citizens from December 2021 to December of 2022. Some of these bites happen on the dog owner's property, some occur while families with small children are out walking or when adults are outside exercising.

The 2023 Civil Grand Jury decided to investigate San Bernardino City Animal Services. In order to do that, the Grand Jury reviewed the statistics of Rancho Cucamonga Animal Field Services as well, because both cities are of similar size in population.

Evidence shows that the majority of Rancho Cucamonga's and San Bernardino's residents are responsible dog owners. The few that are not may face legal action being taken against them by the City and the County, as well as hefty fines.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this investigation into the San Bernardino Department of Animal Services, the Grand Jury read documents from both the SBCAS and RCAFS, including Animal Control Field Reports, 2022 statistics and euthanasia records. The Grand Jury conducted multiple interviews of administration, employees, Animal Control Officers, victims of dog bites and owners of stray, aggressive dogs. The GJ also read documents and conducted interviews of Rancho Cucamonga City Animal Care Services employees in order to compare what a city of similar size is doing to combat the number of stray, aggressive and biting dogs.

In fact, although Rancho Cucamonga has a larger population per square mile, (Rancho Cucamonga: 4,349.4, San Bernardino: 3,574.7 per US 2020 Census) and despite San Bernardino Animal Control Officers being better equipped with laptops, phones and SBACS dispatchers. San Bernardino still has twice as many dog attacks on their citizens as Rancho

Cucamonga. This adds to the perception that the sheer number of stray dogs in the city of San Bernardino may be an important element in the number of dog attacks and should be addressed. (See the charts below)

The Grand Jury attended a court hearing involving dogs impounded in the City of San Bernardino. The GJ completed a ride-along with Animal Control Officers in San Bernardino. Finally, the Civil Grand Jury visited the City of San Bernardino Animal Shelter to observe the condition of the shelter and the workings of Animal Services.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the City of San Bernardino, dog bites can often be prevented, but that must include the understanding that responsible pet owners be routinely educated about:

- their choice of dog breeds
- the time owners are willing to put into training their animal
- the proper response to a stray or strange animal
- the fact that Animal Control Officers are there to assist
- rewards that come with owning an animal

Knowledge and skill in dealing with an aggressive or stray canine can help reduce the number of dog attacks. This was on full display as part of the Grand Jury investigation.

Evidence showed the City of San Bernardino ACOs are well trained. They are efficient at arriving at a scene and de-escalating a situation where there are loose dogs. The ACOs remain calm and in control.

They are trained to scan for micro-chips, to identify the owner, and place the animals in separate cages/trucks and transport them to the San Bernardino Animal Shelter. The officers display skill and knowledge rather than fear in their rescue of the dogs of unknown temperament.

## **Guidelines/Website Information**

The City of San Bernardino Animal Services recommends the following to the public on their website: ([www.SBCity.Org/City-Hall-Animal](http://www.SBCity.Org/City-Hall-Animal))

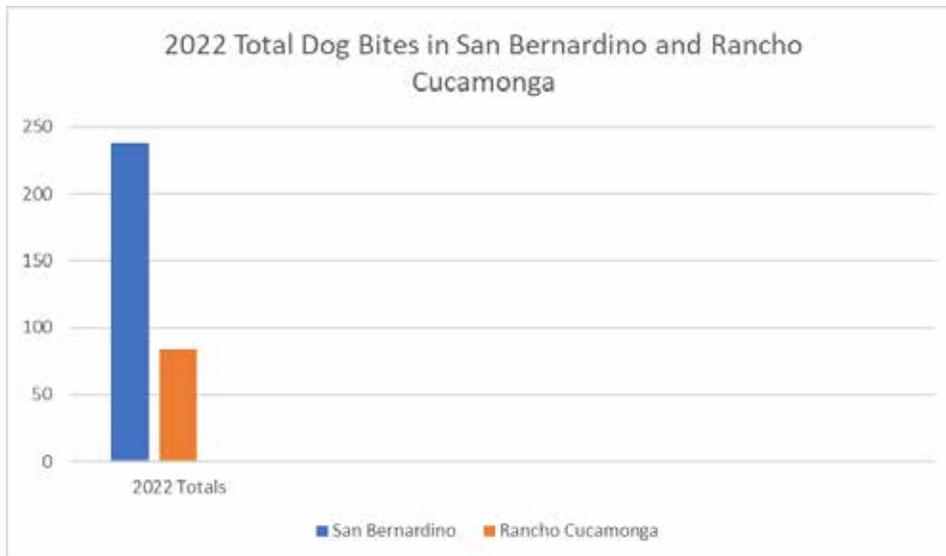
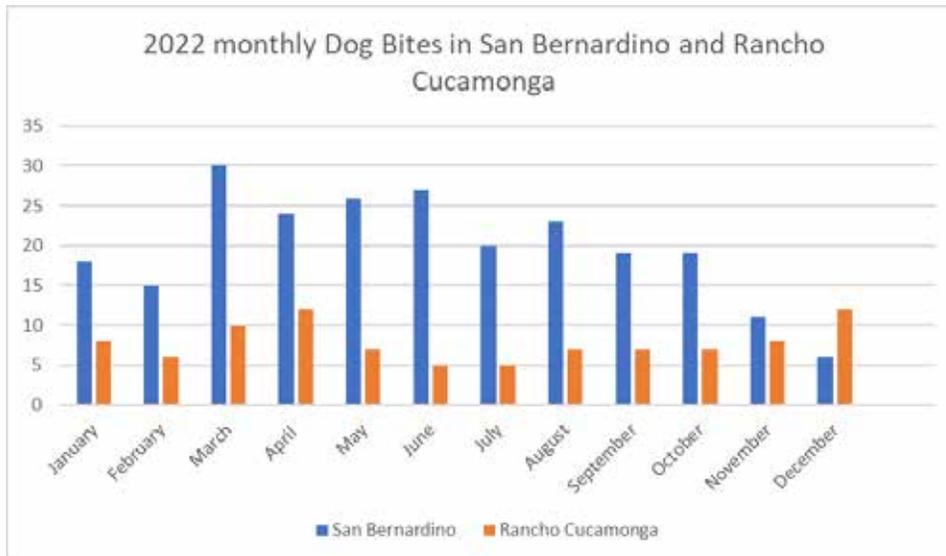
- Keep your dog in an adequately fenced enclosure that enables it to exercise according to its size
- Lock your gate to prevent unauthorized access
- Housetrain your dogs so they can be inside with their family
- Control your dog with a handheld leash when away from home
- Socialize with other people and pets as circumstances permit
- Look for opportunities for formal training at your local pet store, veterinarian or city recreation department. This will offer a structured environment to train and socialize your animal with other pets and people
- Spay or neuter your dog. This will reduce your dog's desire to roam
- If you don't know how your dog will react to a new situation, proceed carefully
- Never leave your dog unattended with a small child

Simple guidelines, as the ones noted above, can help prevent many dog bites. There are numerous consequences for dog owners when their pet bites someone. There are fines attached to some bite incidents that the owner is responsible to pay. Also, their pet can be confined in quarantine, or euthanized if no other alternative is available for the pet's safe return.

National Dog Bite Prevention Week, sponsored by the AVMA, is slated for the second full week in April each year. The focus is education on dog bite prevention and sharing tips on what to do if you find yourself in a situation with an aggressive dog.

## Comparison of the two cities

### Bar Charts



Data Source: San Bernardino and Rancho Cucamonga Animal Services data. Charts created by the Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury found, using the US 2020 Census Bureau's report, that the City of Rancho Cucamonga had a total population of 176,336. The population per square mile was 4,349.4. The total land mass in square miles is 40.11.

The same year's report revealed the City of San Bernardino had a population of 220,328. The population per square mile was 3,574. The total land mass in square miles is 62.13.

In the Grand Jury's comparison of RCAFS and SBCAS, the Grand Jury is aware that geographic size is a contributing factor for the increase of stray dogs and dog bites. However, when compared, the larger number of attacks on citizens of San Bernardino, which contained a smaller population per square mile, compelled an investigation.

### **Funding Needed for a New Shelter**

The San Bernardino Animal Shelter is located at 333 Chandler Place, San Bernardino, CA 92408. It is comprised of three modular buildings that serve as Animal Services offices and a public lobby. There are five cinder block buildings of which four are kennels. They are segregated by male, female, quarantined and cats.

The San Bernardino Animal Shelter was built in 1960 and is in need of constant repair and additional kennels.

San Bernardino Animal Services reports that 10 to 12 dogs are received each day. In 2021, there were 2154 adult dogs and 324 puppies processed. In 2022, they processed 2887 adult dogs and 771 that are six months or younger.

Currently there are up to six animals in one kennel. The overcrowding hinders proper socialization because the animal is not meant to be in confinement and makes it more difficult to achieve a successful adoption. Evidence revealed that keeping animals in overcrowded kennels may cause stress on the animals and people may observe behavioral issues which could hinder potential adoptions. (See Photos below)



**SAN BERNARDINO ANIMAL SERVICES DOG KENNEL**



**SAN BERNARDINO ANIMAL SERVICES DOG KENNEL**



**SAN BERNARDINO ANIMAL SERVICES ROW OF KENNELS**



## **SAN BERNARDINO ANIMAL SERVICES CEMENT SLAB FOR KENNEL EXPANSION**

### **INCREASED FUNDING NEEDED**

In the City of San Bernardino in 2022, 1250 adult dogs were adopted by private parties. There were 374 puppies adopted. Eight hundred and fifteen adult dogs and 230 puppies were transferred to rescue services (non-profit organizations who sometimes adopt animals with behavioral issues and prepare them for adoption). Five hundred animals, adults and puppies, were returned to their owners.

Evidence showed increased funding is needed for:

- additional Animal Control Officers
- an additional supervisor
- an on-site veterinarian
- a veterinary technician
- public education to inform the public about reactions to stray or aggressive dogs, proper yard confinement and the partnership role that San Bernardino Animal Services offers to the public

San Bernardino Animal Services has been allocated land for a new facility. The cost for the land alone is estimated at \$2 million. The building of the new facility itself would run an additional \$70 million.

The preliminary design for the facility has been completed. What is needed now is additional funding.

## **POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL**

Currently, evidence shows the San Bernardino City Shelter has begun writing a Policy and Procedures Manual. However, the current unfinished Manual refers to specific staff names, instead of positions. The staff names need to be deleted, and staff positions be inserted instead. The reason to eliminate staff names is to provide consistency in case of staff leaving. The GJ found the Manual needs to be finished and updated, with specific staff names removed.

## **VETERINARIAN NEEDED ON SITE**

Low-cost spaying or neutering averages around \$200. There is a mandatory spay or neuter ordinance in San Bernardino City. Due to the lack of veterinarian accessibility, the animal may be sent home with an “I will neuter later” form. Animal Services takes a \$100 deposit that is paid back to the owner once proof is shown of spaying or neutering. Immediate on-site spaying or neutering would dramatically reduce the number of loose dogs and dog bites.

Evidence revealed that spaying and neutering pets will significantly decrease the number of stray dogs because they are less likely to leave their yard to look for a mate if they are spayed or neutered. However, many pet owners in the city do not have the funds for altering their dog. San Bernardino Animal Services contracts with an outside veterinarian and animals must be transferred to that veterinarian. An in-shelter veterinarian will help reduce the backlog of dogs who need to be neutered or spayed before being adopted out. Additionally, this may reduce the cost of medical procedures for the shelter and for pet owners.

## **PET OWNER PERCEPTION: EDUCATION PROGRAM NEEDED**

Evidence showed that the public has a negative, adversarial image of animal services. Public outreach is needed to inform people that Animal Control Officers are available to find their lost dog, advise them about proper yard confinement, advise and assist in vaccinations, spaying and neutering. They are not there for the sole purpose of confiscating the dog. If Animal Control Officers had their own “beat” (area, see Glossary), they could be more visible and answer more questions from dog owners.

## **COMMENDATIONS**

The 2023 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury commends the San Bernardino Department of Animal Services for the positive changes that have been made in the last four years. For example, ACOs now have laptops in their trucks as standard equipment. This saves time by making the field entries immediately. Evidence shows new trucks have been added to the department this year, which is helping deal with the tremendous number of strays daily.

The City of San Bernardino Department of Animal Services is to be commended for doing their own dispatch services, thereby prioritizing the needs of the community when dealing with stray, aggressive and/or biting dogs.

The Animal Control Officers who work for the City of San Bernardino Department of Animal Services are to be commended for their dedication, caring and hard work to help animals.



## SAN BERNARDINO ANIMAL SERVICES NEW TRUCK



## **SAN BERNARDINO ANIMAL SERVICES TRUCK**

The Grand Jury was very impressed with Animal Services and their staff, who displayed professionalism and a deep level of concern for the welfare of the animals. The Grand Jury commends the administration and staff for making every effort to identify a properly socialized dog for adoption and searching for reasons not to euthanize the animal.

## **CONCLUSION**

The investigation into the San Bernardino City Department of Animal Services resulted in the Grand Jury coming to the following conclusions:

- Animal Services is doing the best it can in light of the huge job they are undertaking, and the Department is improving
- Animal Services needs additional finances to immediately hire additional ACOs
- Animal Services needs additional finances to immediately order equipped ACO trucks
- Animal Services needs a public education program to inform and assist dog owners about their responsibilities, how to deal with an aggressive dog and the partnership role that Animal Services offers
- a fully staffed Animal Services could assign specific territories or beats to the Animal Control Officers. This would help the ACO in identifying “escape” prone dogs, learning about the owner and his home, and identifying aggressive animals. These beats are not withstanding in the event of emergency assistance needed in another area of town
- hire an on-site veterinarian

The Grand Jury concludes that the San Bernardino Animal Services Department continues to strive to ensure the Animal Control Officers do an effective job for the City of San Bernardino.

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	REQUIRED RESPONSE
<p><b>F-1:</b> The Animal Services Department is underfunded and understaffed.</p>	<p><b>R-1a:</b> Increase funding for Animal Services.</p> <p><b>R-1b:</b> The Grand Jury recommends increased funding is necessary to allow Animal Services to hire additional ACOs.</p>	<p>July 1, 2024</p>	<p>The San Bernardino City Council</p>
<p><b>F-2:</b> San Bernardino Animal Services needs a veterinarian on site to take care of pets' medical needs.</p>	<p><b>R-2a:</b> Hire an on-site veterinarian which would save time and money.</p> <p><b>R-2b:</b> The Grand Jury recommends a Partnership with San Bernardino City Unified School District to create an Animal Services Pathway program for high school students to learn about animal care, becoming groomers, veterinary technicians and veterinarians.</p> <p><b>R-2c:</b> Create an outreach program for prospective veterinary hires.</p>	<p>September 1, 2024</p>	<p>The San Bernardino City Council</p>
<p><b>F-3:</b> San Bernardino Animal Services does not currently have a checklist that all ACOs may use to inspect the yard of an offending owner of a stray or biting dog. This is needed</p>	<p><b>R-3:</b> The Grand Jury recommends that the Animal Services Department develop a uniform written checklist for ACOs to check and ensure that the yard is secure. A copy of the checklist is to be given to the owner.</p>	<p>April 1, 2024</p>	<p>The San Bernardino City Council</p>

<p>for consistency of documenting the encounter and putting the owner on notice to remediate the problem area.</p>			
<p><b>F-4:</b> The SBCAS Policy and Procedure Manual is not complete, nor updated every year, thus the procedures for ACOs are not completely clear and laid out in written form.</p>	<p><b>R-4a:</b> The Grand Jury recommends that the SBCAS complete writing the Policy and Procedure Manual and eliminate the names of employees and use the staff positions instead. Review the Manual annually and present current changes in laws to staff monthly.</p> <p><b>R-4b:</b> Hold monthly or bimonthly staff meetings at the Shelter with management and ACOs to bring everyone up to date on the latest laws and/or developments in the field of Animal Care.</p>	<p>July 1, 2024</p>	<p>The San Bernardino City Council</p>
<p><b>F-5:</b> Currently, ACOs do not have assigned areas (beats) of responsibility within the City of San Bernardino. If SBCAS assigned different beats to each ACO, it would save time and fuel, provide a quicker response, and increase time for educating the pet owners and public who reside</p>	<p><b>R-5a:</b> The Grand Jury recommends that SBCAS divide the city into separate beats of the city and require ACOs to cover just that portion of the city each day.</p> <p><b>R-5b:</b> The Grand Jury recommends the City of San Bernardino provide animal care training to the public twice annually. Each ACO is to provide training for pet owners in his/her beat via online or in-person.</p>	<p>September 1, 2024</p> <p>September 1, 2024</p>	<p>The San Bernardino City Council</p>

in the ACO's area.			
<b>F-6:</b> The public perception of Animal Control Officers is that they are a threat to their pet.	<b>R-6:</b> The Grand Jury recommends that the SBAS reach out and educate the public about Animal Services via in-person and other forms of media.	September 1, 2024	The San Bernardino City Council
<b>F-7:</b> One of the biggest reasons for the continued spike in dog attacks/bites in the City of San Bernardino is due to the number of non-spayed/neutered animals in the city.	<b>R-7:</b> The Grand Jury recommends the SBAS reach out and educate the public in the City of San Bernardino about the benefits of spaying/neutering dogs. Education to be delivered in-person and other forms of media.	September 1, 2024	The San Bernardino City Council

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

**San Bernardino City Council**

## INVITED RESPONSES

**Kristine Watson, Director of City of San Bernardino Animal Services**

## GLOSSARY

The following Glossary was created by the Grand Jury to provide context and information to terms used in this report.

1. **American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA):** A not-for-profit association of veterinarians that provide continued education, publications and other resources about animals to the public.
2. **Animal Control Officers:** The staff of San Bernardino City Department of Animal Services who are responsible for responding to the public's calls and dealing with dogs, and other animals, in the city limits.
3. **Beat:** An assigned area of responsibility for each Animal Control Officer.
4. **Euthanasia:** The medical process of ending the life of an animal.
5. **Foster care for animals:** The temporary care of an animal pending a successful permanent adoption.
6. **RCAFS:** Rancho Cucamonga Animal Field Services.
7. **SBCDAS:** San Bernardino City Department of Animal Services.

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