



Report Highlights

The State of Louisiana's Role in Animal Welfare and Control Activities

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Why We Conducted This Audit

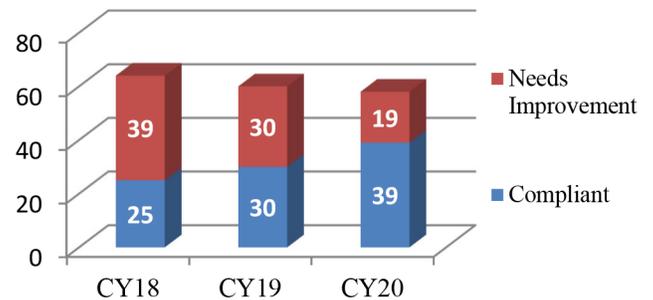
We evaluated the state of Louisiana's role in animal welfare and control activities. We conducted this audit because the humane care and treatment of companion animals, such as dogs and cats, when they are in the custody of animal shelters and other facilities, is important to the public and to public health and safety. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) serves in a supporting role to local authorities through its Louisiana Shelter Inspection program, which operates under the guidance of the Louisiana Animal Control Advisory Task Force (Advisory Task Force) within LDAF. Other state entities with a role in animal welfare and control activities include the Louisiana Board of Veterinary Medicine, the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program within the Louisiana Department of Health, and the Louisiana Board of Pharmacy.

What We Found

We found that Louisiana should expand and strengthen its role in animal welfare and control activities to better ensure the humane treatment of animals in all types of facilities that care for them. Specifically, we found:

- **State entities do not have sufficient legal authority in state law to effectively regulate animal welfare and control activities.** Although LDAF serves in an advisory role to public animal control shelters, no state entity has regulatory oversight of any animal facility, including boarding facilities, grooming facilities, and rescue organizations. Thirty-one other states require that at least some facilities involved with animal welfare and control be licensed or registered with the state. For example, LDAF conducts periodic inspections of public animal control shelters, but state law limits its role as advisory instead of regulatory, and it receives no funding for its activities. LDAF inspection reports from calendar years 2018 to 2020 showed that, while adherence to the *Minimum Standards for Animal Shelters* have improved over time, many public animal control shelters are still in need of improvement.

**Results of Public Animal Control Shelter Inspections
Calendar Years (CY) 2018 through 2020**



Source: Created by legislative auditor's staff using information provided by LDAF.

- **State law does not require that Louisiana's public animal control shelters adopt or follow the *Minimum Standards for Animal Shelters*.** In addition, these standards do not align with nationally-recommended practices. For example, we found that nine (45.0%) of 20 practices deemed unacceptable by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' (ASV) *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* are not specifically prohibited in Louisiana's standards. In addition, Louisiana's standards do not include practices that are considered essential, such as ensuring sufficient staff hours to meet the needs of animals in a shelter.

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The State of Louisiana's Role in Animal Welfare and Control Activities

What We Found (Cont.)

- **Louisiana lacks consistent and reliable sources of funding for animal welfare and control activities, including funding for state entities and local shelter operations. In addition, even though state law requires parishes to provide suitable shelters or facilities, 11 parishes have not established public animal control shelters because of lack of funding.** State law also allows local governing authorities to establish dog and cat license and registration fees for the operation of their animal control programs, but not all local governing authorities have done so.
- **While in January 2020 Louisiana was ranked seventh nationally for its animal protection laws, more needs to be done to improve the investigation, prosecution, and prevention of animal cruelty and abuse in the state to ensure compliance with those laws.** The extent to which animal cruelty exists in Louisiana is not fully known, because data on animal cruelty and abuse is not centralized or readily available to the public. Lack of local ordinances on companion animals inhibit prosecution of such cases. In addition, lack of training for law enforcement and prosecutors regarding animal cruelty and abuse, and its linkage to other violent crimes could result in failure to protect not only abused animals, but the families and communities in which these animals live.
- **Louisiana does not have a statewide initiative to reduce the population of homeless and stray animals unlike some other states. Lack of low-cost spay and neuter programs, along with a lack of public education on responsible pet ownership, contribute to pet overpopulation. According to stakeholders, thousands of animals die each year in the state due to overpopulation and abandonment.** Some public animal control shelters noted their biggest challenges are the overwhelming amount of stray animals and the lack of funding and access to spay and neuter services. Other states use a combination of state appropriations, license plate sales, fees, and donations to fund their pet overpopulation programs, which include spay and neuter surgeries as well as public education and outreach.



Source: <https://bit.ly/30rpsUJ>