*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Karen Leblanc. I’m the director of LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our recently released report on animal welfare and control in Louisiana.

The purpose of this audit was to evaluate the state’s role in animal welfare and control activities.

In Louisiana, multiple state entities have responsibilities related to animal welfare and control, including the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, the Board of Veterinary Medicine, the Department of Health’s Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program, and the Board of Pharmacy.

However, none of these entities have sufficient legal authority to effectively regulate animal welfare and control activities. Although the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry serves as an advisor to public animal control shelters and conducts periodic inspections of them, it cannot require that these shelters comply with its recommendations, and it receives no funding for these activities. Furthermore, no one state entity has regulatory oversight of any other types of animal facilities, such as boarding facilities, grooming businesses, and rescue organizations.

Unlike Louisiana, thirty-one other states require at least some facilities involved with animal welfare and control to be licensed or registered.

Louisiana also does not require public animal shelters to adopt or follow the state’s *Minimum Standards for Animal Shelters* in state law. In addition, the standards themselves do not align with nationally-recommended practices.

For example, we found that nine of 20 practices deemed unacceptable by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians’ *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* are not specifically prohibited in Louisiana’s standards.

Furthermore, Louisiana’s standards do not include practices that are considered essential, such as ensuring sufficient staff hours to properly care for animals in a shelter.

Funding animal welfare and control activities is important, but we found that Louisiana does not have a consistent and reliable source of funding for these activities, including both funding for state entities and for local shelter operations.

For instance, even though state law requires parishes to provide suitable animal shelters or facilities, 11 parishes have not done so because of a lack of funding.State law also allows local governing authorities to establish dog and cat license and registration fees to help operate their animal control programs, but not all have done so.

In January 2020, Louisiana was ranked seventh nationally for its animal protection laws, but we found that the state needs to do more to improve the investigation, prosecution, and prevention of animal cruelty and abuse.

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 related to companion animals also inhibits prosecution of such cases.

The lack of training for law enforcement and prosecutors on animal cruelty and abuse, as well as the connection between animal cruelty and other violent crimes, could result in a failure to protect not only abused animals, but also the families and communities in which these animals live.

We found as well that Louisiana does not have a statewide initiative to reduce the population of homeless and stray animals. The lack of low-cost spay and neuter programs, along with the lack of public education on responsible pet ownership, contributes to the state’s pet overpopulation issues.

Some public animal control shelters we spoke with noted their biggest challenges are the overwhelming number 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.

As a result of our audit, we developed four matters for legislative consideration.

The first one suggested that the legislature may wish to consider revising state law to give more authority to entities that have a role in animal welfare and control, and to require that animal facilities and businesses be inspected, and licensed or registered.

The second one suggested that the legislature may wish to consider requiring public animal control shelters follow the state’s *Minimum Standards for Animal Shelters,* as well as periodically revising and updating these standards to comply with nationally recommended practices.

The third one suggested thatthe legislature may wish to consider identifying consistent sources of funding for animal welfare and control activities. Such funding could come from assessing license and registration fees on animal facilities and businesses, and requiring parishes to charge fees for registering dogs and cats.

The fourth one suggestedthatthe legislature consider requiring that law enforcement agencies and public animal control agencies report all animal cruelty and abuse cases to the Louisiana Incident-Based Reporting System, as well as requiring animal control shelters, law enforcement agencies, district attorneys’ offices, and relevant state agencies to receive annual training on animal cruelty and abuse.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports. You can subscribe to LLA Reports at Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, or your favorite podcast platform.*

*This podcast was created as a part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. The full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*