



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

November 14, 2025

Honorable Maureen F. Hallahan
Presiding Judge
San Diego Superior Court
1100 Union Street, 10th Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Subject: San Diego County Grand Jury Report, *Fit To Be Tied! Why Are So Many Dogs Running Wild in San Diego Parks?*

Honorable Judge Hallahan,

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933.05(a), (b), and (c), the City of San Diego provides the attached response to the findings and recommendations included in the above-referenced Grand Jury Report.

If you require additional information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Emily Piatanesi, Policy Advisor, at 619-236-6330.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Todd Gloria".

Todd Gloria
Mayor
City of San Diego

Attachments:

1. City of San Diego Response to San Diego County Grand Jury Report Titled "*Fit To Be Tied! Why Are So Many Dogs Running Wild in San Diego Parks?*"

cc: James Tuck, Foreperson, 2024/2025 San Diego County Grand Jury
Honorable Council President Joe LaCava and Members of the City Council
Honorable City Attorney Heather Ferbert
Paola Avila, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
Charles Modica, Independent Budget Analyst
Alia Khouri, Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Kris McFadden, Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Kristina Peralta, Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Casey Smith, Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Rolando Charvel, Chief Financial Officer

Page 2

Honorable Maureen F. Hallahan, Presiding Judge, San Diego Superior Court

November 14, 2025

Robert Logan, Chief, Fire-Rescue Department

Scott Wahl, Chief, Police Department

Emily Piatanesi, Policy Advisor, Office of the Mayor

Jeff Peelle, Assistant Director, Department of Finance

Trisha Tacke, Program Manager, Compliance Department

**City of San Diego Response to
San Diego County Grand Jury Report Titled
“Fit to be Tied! Why Are So Many Dogs Running Wild in San Diego Parks?”**

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933(c), the City of San Diego provides the following response from the Mayor to the applicable findings and recommendations included in the above referenced Grand Jury Report.

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS:

Finding 1: *San Diego Humane Society (SDHS) often has fewer than four Park Patrol Officers on duty and two patrol vehicles in use in the City, which fails to meet requirements of the Park Officer Program encompassed in the Agreement between the City and SDHS.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees with the Grand Jury’s finding.

The Agreement required the assignment of four full-time equivalent (FTE) officers to the Park Officer Program; it did not require continuous coverage by four officers at all times.

Additionally, the City suspended the Park Officer Program effective June 15, 2025, due to Fiscal Year 2026 budget reductions and corresponding adjustments to SDHS compensation. This action was taken in accordance with the Agreement, which permits modifications to the scope of work upon mutual agreement and further authorizes the City to terminate the Park Officer Program at its sole discretion.

Finding 2: *SDHS relies on Park Rangers to support its efforts in leash enforcement.*

Response: The Mayor agrees with the Grand Jury’s finding.

Park Rangers patrol City parks and enforce park rules and regulations as part of their broader responsibilities. While their primary duties do not focus exclusively on leash law enforcement, Park Rangers have historically provided support in this area in coordination with SDHS.

Due to Fiscal Year 2026 budget reductions and resulting adjustments to SDHS compensation, Park Rangers have assumed responsibility for all non-exigent leash law violations occurring in City parks.

Finding 3: *The City’s Park of the Month Program does not clearly set forth expectations on enforcement requirements outside the designated Park.*

Response: The Mayor agrees with the Grand Jury’s finding.

While the Park of the Month Program does not explicitly define enforcement expectations outside the designated park, it is a proactive initiative that outlines clear enforcement responsibilities within the selected location, including routine patrols and focused engagement.

It is important to note that the Park Officer Program, including the Park of the Month component, was suspended effective June 15, 2025, due to Fiscal Year 2026 budget

reductions. As a result, associated enforcement activities are no longer in effect at this time. Park patrons encountering off-leash dogs in parks and joint-use areas are encouraged to use City's [Get It Done Program](#) to report non-emergency matters and request city services.

Finding 4: *The City failed to keep track (or documentation) of the number of leash-law citations issued the first year (July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024) of the current Agreement with SDHS.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

SDHS has provided required enforcement statistics through quarterly reports in compliance with the Agreement. While the contract does not require separate tracking of leash-law specific citations, overall citation data has been consistently documented and shared with the City. The quarterly reports are publicly available at: [Municipal Quarterly Impact Reports - San Diego Humane Society](#).

Finding 5: *There was a significant, 90% drop in all animal control citation/warning issuance during the first year of the current Agreement.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Within the annual reports, there are an identified 208 citations in Fiscal Year 2024 and 461 citations in Fiscal Year 2023, which represents a 45% decrease. These reports are publicly available at: [Municipal Annual Impact Reports - San Diego Humane Society](#).

Finding 6: *Citation issuance using County Code does not meet the requirements of the Agreement.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Citations issued under the San Diego County Code are consistent with the requirements of the Agreement. Pursuant to San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 4, Section 44.0300, the City of San Diego formally adopts by reference the provisions of the County Code pertaining to animal control. As such, citations issued under those provisions are legally valid and in compliance with the Agreement.

The referenced Municipal Code section can be found on the City Clerk's website: [Article 4: Disease Control — Nuisances](#).

Finding 7: *Fines collected by the Courts for leash-law violations within the City are not being paid to the City General Fund.*

Response: The Mayor agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Fines for leash-law violations are set and collected by the Superior Court of California and are not directed to the City's General Fund. These violations are classified as criminal offenses, requiring individuals to appear in court. A citation for having a dog off-leash may be charged as either an infraction or a misdemeanor and is currently adjudicated through the court system. Leash laws are intended to protect public health and safety by ensuring that dog owners maintain control of their pets in public spaces.

Fines for violations associated with ordinances concerning dogs are publicly accessible in the Bail Schedule posted on the Superior Court of California, County of San Diego's

Misdemeanor and Infraction Bail Schedule: [Bail and Sentencing Information | Superior Court of California – County of San Diego](#).

Finding 8: *The City has not adequately monitored SDHS citations.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees in part with the Grand Jury's finding.

The City receives regular citation data from SDHS, including the location of where citations were issued in City Parks, which enables the City to monitor enforcement activity.

The City does not track the final disposition of citations, including fines assessed or collected. The Superior Court has the sole discretion as to the actual imposition of fines and the amount.

Finding 9: *The City has not adequately monitored SDHS response times.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

City staff regularly monitors and reviews response time data from SDHS. For example, average response times for Priority 1 calls which are those involving persons or animals in immediate danger have decreased in Fiscal Year 2024 as compared to Fiscal Year 2023.

City staff and SDHS meet monthly to review and discuss performance, including response times. In addition, SDHS provides detailed response time data through transparent quarterly and annual reports, which are publicly available: [Municipal Quarterly Impact Reports – San Diego Humane Society](#) and [Municipal Annual Impact Reports – San Diego Humane Society](#).

Finding 10: *Leash-law signs in City parks are often confusing, contradictory, or display outdated information.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees in part with the Grand Jury's finding.

Leash-law signage in City parks is reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis. When necessary, the City takes corrective action to update or replace signage.

Finding 11: *Leash-law signs in City parks do not provide information regarding potential monetary fines for violations.*

Response: The Mayor agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

While leash-law signage in City parks clearly states that dogs must be leashed, it does not include information about specific fines. This is because fines for leash-law violations are set and adjudicated by the Superior Court of California and may vary depending on the nature of the offense (e.g., infraction vs. misdemeanor), prior violations, and judicial discretion. However, the City is exploring options to enhance public awareness through educational materials or QR codes linking to current fine schedules published by the Superior Court.

Finding 12: *Leash-law signs in City parks do not deter many pet owners from running their dogs off leash in parks.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees in part with the Grand Jury's finding.

While leash-law signage alone may not deter all pet owners from allowing their dogs off leash, it remains a necessary and effective tool for informing the public of park rules and legal requirements. Signage helps promote voluntary compliance among the majority of park users who are law-abiding and responsive to posted regulations.

Finding 13: *Leash enforcement on City property often takes the form of verbal written warnings and education from Park Officers even when the incidents do not occur in joint-use areas.*

Response: The Mayor agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

SDHS Officers regularly promote leash-law compliance through education, including verbal and written warnings, both in and outside of joint-use areas. SDHS employs a progressive enforcement strategy aligned with national best practices in animal services, using discretion based on the situation. This approach prioritizes public and animal safety, encourages voluntary compliance, and acknowledges that enforcement discretion is essential to effective field operations. While warnings are often appropriate for first-time violations, both SDHS Officers and Park Rangers retain and exercise their authority to issue citations when warranted.

Finding 14: *Humane Law Enforcement Officers scarcely enforce the City's leash laws.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Leash law enforcement is a regular component of SDHS patrols and response activity.

The City supports SDHS's progressive enforcement model, which emphasizes education and is in line with national best practices. Citations are issued when appropriate, particularly for repeat violations or public safety risks.

However, resulting from the Fiscal Year 2026 City budget reductions, Park Rangers have assumed responsibility for all non-exigent leash law violations occurring in City parks.

Finding 15: *A regression in SDHS performance measures warrants a City performance evaluation.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

City staff routinely evaluate SDHS performance across a broad range of responsibilities and are actively collaborating with SDHS to improve response times, with measurable improvements seen in Priority 1 calls. No evidence has been provided to substantiate a regression in SDHS performance. SDHS meets its reporting obligations, which establish quantitative benchmarks that the City uses to monitor performance and ensure ongoing accountability.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: *Require SDHS to adhere to the Agreement by assigning no fewer than four Park Patrol Officers in two vehicles dedicated to leash-law enforcement patrols in the City, particularly on days (including weekends) and during hours of the day when violations are most likely to occur.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented. The Park Officer Program was suspended effective June 15, 2025, as part of broader cost-saving measures in response to the City's Fiscal Year 2026 budget shortfall. As a result, SDHS is no longer required to assign dedicated Park Patrol Officers solely for proactive leash-law enforcement.

While this program is not currently in place, the City remains committed to maintaining ongoing field service activities, including responding to calls for service and meeting response time priorities as outlined in the Agreement.

As budget conditions improve, the City may consider reinstating the Park Officer Program and exploring additional proactive enforcement strategies.

Recommendation 2: *Ensure SDHS humane law enforcement officers actively initiate leash-law patrols in areas outside the designated Park of the Month District.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

SDHS Humane Law Enforcement Officers (HLEOs) have never limited enforcement activities to specific areas, such as those designated under the Park of the Month program. HLEOs have routinely conducted proactive patrols and responded to leash-law complaints throughout the City.

However, due to Fiscal Year 2026 City budget reductions and associated adjustments to SDHS compensation, HLEOs will not be responsible for initiating leash law patrols in City parks unless exigent circumstances exist.

Recommendation 3: *Establish a reporting mechanism with SDHS that includes the number of leash-law citations along with currently reported numbers for warnings, and education contacts.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

SDHS currently provides overall citation data in quarterly reports submitted to the City. However, the existing agreement does not require citation data to be broken down by specific violation types, such as leash-law citations.

Due to Fiscal Year 2026 City budget reductions and associated adjustments to SDHS compensation, HLEOs will not be responsible for initiating leash law patrols in City parks unless exigent circumstances exist.

Recommendation 4: *Require SDHS to define and respond to leash-law violations in progress as Priority Level 2.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Priority Level 2 is reserved for urgent, non-life-threatening incidents requiring a rapid response. While SDHS treats in-progress leash-law violations seriously, not all such incidents meet the urgency threshold for this classification.

In situations where a leash-law violation involves an aggressive animal actively endangering people or other animals, the call may be elevated to Priority 1 or 2 on a case-by-case basis, consistent with the existing response framework. Automatically assigning all in-progress leash-law violations to Priority Level 2 would strain response resources and risk delaying responses to more urgent public safety matters, including dog attacks in progress.

Due to Fiscal Year 2026 City budget reductions and associated adjustments to SDHS compensation, HLEOs will not be responsible for initiating leash law patrols in City parks unless exigent circumstances exist.

Recommendation 5: *Require SDHS to meet Contractual service call response time for Priority Levels 2-5.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

The City recognizes the importance of meeting contractual response times for Priority Levels 2-5 and is committed to supporting SDHS in achieving this standard. While SDHS makes every effort to meet the required response times, fluctuations may occur due to staffing levels, call volume, and the nature of individual calls. Given these factors and the need to operate within allocated resources, it is not always feasible to consistently meet response time targets.

Performance and compliance with contract terms are monitored through ongoing coordination, oversight, and regular discussions between City staff and SDHS.

Recommendation 6: *Standardize wording of signs regarding prohibition of off-leash dogs to include correct telephone numbers, Municipal Code citation, and potential (or minimum) fine amounts for violators.*

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.

The City is in the process of developing standardized signage in parks that references the applicable Municipal Code related to leash laws. Updated signs will direct community members to a City website containing information on dog-related regulations, including a map of designated dog parks and a link to the Superior Court's bail schedule for fine information. This effort aims to improve clarity, consistency, and public awareness.

Given there are over 400 parks, this effort will be staggered over time, with the first phase of signs installed in joint-use parks within the next 3 months and full implementation across all parks expected within the next year.

Recommendation 7: *Require SDHS to rigorously enforce leash-law citation issuance, including effective tracking for repeat offenders, with judicious use of education and acts of goodwill limited to joint-use areas.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

The City supports the issuance of citations and remains committed to ensuring leash laws are enforced consistently and appropriately. Each leash law incident/encounter

has its own site specific facts, and officer use of discretion including the use of education, warnings, and citations based on the nature of the violation and the individual's history, reflects national best practices in animal services.

Requiring mandatory citation issuance or limiting the use of educational efforts would undermine this discretion and would necessitate a contract amendment and a change in the City's established approach.

Due to Fiscal Year 2026 City budget reductions and associated adjustments to SDHS compensation, HLEOs will not be responsible for initiating leash law patrols in City parks unless exigent circumstances exist.

Recommendation 8: *Review and familiarize itself with how the Court issues fines and forfeitures and educate officers on proper leash-law citation to ensure the City receives appropriate revenue.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

Officers are trained to issue leash-law citations, which are processed through the San Diego Superior Court system. These fines are criminal in nature and support broader enforcement authority, including compliance measures and victim restitution.

Recommendation 9: *Launch a performance audit and evaluation of SDHS leash law and broader animal enforcement responsibilities to focus on incident response times, use of proper Municipal or County Code citations, and overall citation issuance.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

The City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department provides ongoing oversight and evaluation of the full scope of services outlined in the animal services contract, including enforcement activities. In addition, due to the operational realignment resulting from Fiscal Year 2026 budget reductions, a performance audit focused specifically on SDHS leash law enforcement is not warranted.