

## Racial Equity Analysis for Significant Board Items

**Board Item Date:** July 9, 2024

**Board Item Name:** SCAS & Tobacco - Administrative Citation Program

### **I. Proposal: What is your proposal and the desired results/outcomes?**

*a. What is the policy, program, practice, or budget decision under consideration?*

Sonoma County Animal Services (SCAS) is looking to implement administrative citations to be used as an additional enforcement tool for Animal Services Officers (Officers). This would give Officers an alternative method for increasing compliance with local code without escalating a situation to a criminal citation.

*b. What are the desired results and outcomes?*

In support of the County of Sonoma's strategic plan pillar of ensuring a healthy and safe community and recognition that violations of established codes and ordinances can lessen the quality of life in the community, an administrative citation program will provide an alternative enforcement path to support additional education for community members, will assist communities in a way which will reduce potential for criminal citation in communities that face disparities, and provide an opportunity for streamlined County governance.

*c. What does the proposal have the ability to impact?*

The proposal has the potential to impact criminal code enforcement by becoming an alternative tool to a criminal citation. This will lessen the burden on the individual receiving the citation by allowing them to take corrective action directly with our department and eliminate the additional step of interfacing with the court system.

### **II. Data: What is the data? What does the data tell us?**

*a. Will the proposal have impacts in specific geographic areas (neighborhoods, areas, or regions)? What are the racial demographics of those living in the area?*

Since our current data is solely zip code-based, we are not able to determine clear racial patterns in enforcement. Our current enforcement trends are more centered on densely populated areas of Sonoma County. While we expect this trend to remain the same based on the implementation of the administrative citations, we will be working on expanding our data collection capabilities to monitor the impacts and continue to work with the racial equity toolkit.

*b. What does population level data, including quantitative and qualitative data, tell you about existing racial inequities? What does it tell you about root causes or factors influencing racial inequities?*

While we have qualitative data, our quantitative data needs more detail that would allow for a complete analysis of racial demographics and inequities. We are evaluating how ordinance language and enforcement affect racial equity to determine if root causes can be identified and addressed. Over the next two fiscal years, we plan to open up the ordinances and update them with County Counsel.

c. *What performance level data do you have available for your proposal? This should include data associated with existing programs or policies?*

We have qualitative data that supports the program's need for a less punitive enforcement tool to aid in gaining compliance without making an infraction a criminal issue. Program changes such as providing an online dog licensing program for broader access, having all bilingual permanent customer relations staff, expansion of access programs for veterinary care, and continuing training for the officers, all are based on feedback received from community stakeholders and community-based organizations to better provide for underserved communities.

d. *Are there data gaps? What additional data would be helpful in analyzing the proposal? If so, how can you obtain better data?*

Through working on our Racial Equity Analysis and framework, we realize that we need to collect more data to be able to serve the community better and identify racial inequities. We acknowledge there are gaps in our data. We would need to collect detailed information about the demographics of the community members we serve.

**III. Community Engagement: How have communities been engaged? Are there opportunities to expand engagement?**

a. *Who are the most affected community members who are concerned with or have experience related to this proposal? How have you involved these community members in the development of this proposal?*

Sonoma County Animal Services is involved with the local community in many ways. We regularly interact with community members through phone service, in our front lobby, with officers in the field, and through our social media. Additionally, we participate in community events, host tours for youth organizations, and have a dedicated team of volunteers who invite conversations about animal welfare and care practices. In the past year, we have participated in local disaster preparedness fairs, Santa Rosa Police Department's (SRPD) Trunk or Treat, National Night Out, Sonoma County Ag Days, SRPD's Community Easter Event, and participated in Career Days and presentations at local schools. Community members who don't have access to preventative veterinary medicine or lack access to infrastructure, such as building fences or appropriate kennel enclosures, are among the most affected. Additionally, there are different cultural practices in how individuals engage in animal guardianship. As an agency, we have noticed a cultural shift to animals and pets becoming family members. The affected community members will benefit from a less punitive form of enforcement, which will allow officers to engage in more education and potentially lessen the likelihood of future repeat incidents.

b. *What has your engagement process told you about the burdens or benefits for different groups?*

Our customer relations staff and field staff have received extensive feedback from previously cited clients who have expressed their frustrations with dealing with the court system and our department to remediate their issues and become compliant with county code or state law.

- c. *What has your engagement process told you about the factors that produce or perpetuate racial inequity related to this proposal?*

Prior to having bilingual permanent front office staff, under-age family members would often assist in translating for their parents, limiting our ability to engage in conversations that could have legal ramifications for the parents. Adding bilingual staff has ensured that we are able to engage directly with the adults responsible, communicate the pertinent ordinances, and provide education. Additionally, seeing their parents treated with respect and in their first language helps the children view our organization as a potential partner instead of punitive agency.

**IV. Analysis and Strategies: What are your strategies for advancing racial equity?**

- a. *Given what you have learned from research and stakeholder involvement, how will your recommended action increase or decrease racial equity? Who would benefit from or be burdened by your action?*

Based on research and previous practice, we have determined that the proposed program will benefit communities across different racial and cultural groups, as it will decrease the burden of having to drive and pay fees to multiple county offices, it will decrease the need of having to take time off work to be present in court, decrease loss of wages as a result, decrease the need for arranging child care to appear in court, and will alleviate the need for translation from younger family members. Overall, it will benefit those being cited, as they will not have to engage with the court system, allowing for ease of future engagement, education, and relationship building with the community.

- b. *What are potential unintended consequences? What are the ways in which your action could be modified to enhance positive impacts or reduce negative impacts?*

There is the potential for increased enforcement during the program's initial onboarding. This could lead to a broader portion of animal owners receiving citations. We strive for a compliance-based model in which our officers first provide resources and information before using punitive actions. The potential for increased administrative enforcement is due to this program offering another tool for officers to gain compliance before escalating to a criminal citation. This could lead to a broader portion of animal owners who are out of compliance receiving corrective citations so they can correct the violation instead of placing the burden of court actions on the individuals. However, this increased enforcement can contribute to increased racial equity in that members of all communities with major and minor infractions will be asked to comply with state and local ordinances. Additionally, community members who historically distrust uniformed officers will be connected with customer relations staff, who will provide education and resources to help them gain compliance and understanding without the burden of having to deal with the court system.

- c. *Are there complementary strategies that you can implement? What are ways in which existing partnerships could be strengthened to maximize impact in the community? How will you partner with stakeholders for long-term positive change?*

We partner heavily with community-based animal welfare organizations. We are working on expanding access to spay/neuter and preventative veterinary care programs. We are increasing our presence at community engagement events to provide education. Additionally, we are working with

various safety net programs for people struggling to care for their animals. This program will potentially provide an additional point of contact for providing access to these resources and will provide additional opportunities for further qualitative data collection on impacts within the community.

*d. Are the impacts aligned with your community outcomes defined in Step 1?*

This program's impacts align with our community outcomes in that it reduces the burden of community members needing to work with the court system and unnecessary complications of compliance with animal-related laws. Reducing the incidence of criminal [animal] code enforcement allows for more equitable and amicable experiences with Animal Services Officers.

**V. Implementation: What is your plan for implementation?**

We will have a clearly outlined policy aligning with our goals protect the health and safety of both animals and people. Staff will be trained prior to the implementation of the program. We anticipate a slow rollout to allow time for Officers and Customer Relations staff to attend the County-Wide Racial Equity 101 Trainings and work with the Health Equity Department within the Department of Health Services. SCAS will work to coordinate with other County departments with Administrative Citation authority to learn from their programs' successes and lessons.

**VI. Accountability and Communication: How will you ensure accountability, communicate, and evaluate results?**

*a. How will impacts be documented and evaluated? Are you achieving the anticipated outcomes? Are you having an impact in the community?*

Our citation processing vendor will allow us to collect more in-depth data. Additionally, licensing metrics will be tracked in our databases. We will monitor these numbers to ensure the impacts align with our desired community outcomes.

*b. What are your messages and communication strategies that will help advance racial equity?*

The department will remain focused on community education and engagement as we implement this program. In addition, we are continuing to serve our diverse community with bilingual staff, printed materials in both English and Spanish, and fostering relationships with community-based organizations to continue providing resources and safety-net programs.

*c. How will you continue to partner and deepen relationships with communities to make sure your work to advance racial equity is working and sustainable for the long-haul?*

In addition to converting the permanent customer relations positions to bilingual, we have expanded our bilingual staff into our community engagement team. We are becoming more involved in community events and school programs to promote animal welfare and education. We will continue to review programs using the racial equity toolkit to ensure a positive impact for all community members.