

GAAA 2026 Animal Welfare Candidate Survey

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This is a public reference copy of the 2026 Candidate Survey.

For readability, the answer choices and comment/explanation fields that candidates see in the actual online survey are not shown in this document. Candidates are provided an opportunity to explain their responses at the end of each section.

The Gwinnett Animal Advocacy Alliance (GAAA) is inviting each candidate for the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners to complete our 2026 Candidate Survey on Animal Welfare.

Decisions made by the Board of Commissioners directly affect animal welfare throughout Gwinnett County — including shelter operations, public safety and enforcement, funding and resources, prevention programs, policies, oversight, and long-term priorities.

This survey is intended to give Gwinnett County voters an opportunity to learn where candidates stand on animal-welfare issues and what actions they would support if elected.

Candidate responses will be published on the [GAAA website](#) and shared through our social media channels. Responses will be presented as submitted and will not be edited in a way that changes their meaning. Candidates who do not submit a response by the deadline will be identified as “No Response.”

Survey deadline: August 21, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. ET

Candidates who need additional time or have questions about the survey may contact us at gwinnettanimalshelteradvocates@gmail.com.

Additional information regarding many of the issues discussed in this questionnaire, including supporting data, records and analyses, is available on the [GAAA website](#).

Who Are We:

The Gwinnett Animal Advocacy Alliance (GAAA) is a citizen-led organization dedicated to improving animal welfare in Gwinnett County through research, education, public engagement and informed advocacy.

Since our founding in 2024, GAAA has examined issues affecting both animals in County custody and animals throughout the broader Gwinnett community. Our work has included reviewing County records and operational data, examining shelter policies and practices, attending Animal Advisory Council meetings, communicating concerns and recommendations to County leadership, and conducting independent analyses of issues affecting animal welfare.

Our advocacy focuses not only on what happens inside the shelter, but also on the broader systems that affect animal welfare in Gwinnett — including prevention, responsible pet ownership, access to spay/neuter services, community cats, animal protection and enforcement, shelter accessibility, volunteer and rescue partnerships, medical care, enrichment, transparency, accountability, and effective public oversight.

GAAA believes that meaningful and sustainable improvement requires collaboration among County leadership, Animal Welfare & Enforcement, community organizations, volunteers, advocates, rescue partners and Gwinnett residents.

Our goal is a humane, effective and accountable animal-welfare system that serves both the animals and people of Gwinnett County.

About this Survey:

Since our first candidate survey in 2024, GAAA has gained a significantly deeper understanding of Gwinnett County's animal-welfare system through public records, County data, independent analyses, community engagement and direct observation of County processes.

The 2026 questionnaire therefore focuses on specific policy and oversight issues that candidates for the Board of Commissioners may be asked to address if elected.

Topics include:

- Governance, independent oversight and citizen representation
- Transparency and accountability
- Shelter animal care, medical care and enrichment
- Euthanasia policies and lifesaving opportunities
- Open intake, shelter capacity and the County safety net
- Spay/neuter access and prevention
- Breeding and responsible pet ownership
- Community cats and TNVR
- Animal protection and enforcement
- Volunteer, foster and rescue partnerships
- Shelter accessibility and community engagement
- Budget priorities and performance measures

Each section provides brief background information followed by questions regarding the candidate's position. Where appropriate, links to supporting information or source material are provided for candidates who would like additional context.

Candidates are encouraged to answer candidly. "Undecided / Need Additional Information" is an acceptable response. When selecting that option, we encourage candidates to explain what additional information they would seek before reaching a decision.

Most importantly, this questionnaire is not intended to determine whether a candidate simply "supports animal welfare." It is intended to help voters understand how candidates would approach the specific policy, funding, oversight and accountability decisions that affect animal welfare in Gwinnett County.

Participation in this survey does not constitute an endorsement by GAAA.

If you have questions about the questionnaire, would like additional supporting information, or experience technical difficulties completing the survey, please contact GAAA at gwinnettanimalshelteradvocates@gmail.com.

Section 1 - About the Candidate

1. Please provide your first and last name.
2. Which Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners seat are you seeking?
3. What is the primary reason you are running for the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners?
4. Prior to receiving this questionnaire, have you had any personal or professional interaction with Gwinnett County Animal Welfare & Enforcement or the Bill Atkinson Animal Welfare Center?
5. Prior to receiving this questionnaire, how familiar were you with current animal-welfare issues in Gwinnett County?
6. Based on your current knowledge, what do you believe are the most significant animal-welfare challenges facing Gwinnett County, and why?

Section 2 - Governance, Independent Oversight & Citizen Representation

OVERVIEW:

In August 2026, the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners repealed the existing structure of the Gwinnett Animal Advisory Council and established a new five-member, skills-based Council.

The previous seven-member Council included community representatives appointed by individual members of the Board of Commissioners. Under the new structure, those Commissioner-appointed community seats have been eliminated and replaced by seats based primarily on specified professional or organizational qualifications. The Director of Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement will serve as the Council's nonvoting chairperson.

Advisory councils can provide subject-matter expertise, community perspectives, and independent recommendations to elected officials. Because the Animal Advisory Council advises on matters involving the same department whose Director will now chair the Council, the restructuring raises important questions about citizen representation, independence, and the appropriate relationship between an advisory body, County staff, and the Board of Commissioners.

The following questions address how you believe animal-welfare oversight and citizen participation should function in Gwinnett County.

QUESTIONS:

7. Do you support restoring individual Commissioner-appointed community representatives to the Gwinnett Animal Advisory Council while retaining the professional expertise included in the new Council structure?
8. Do you believe the Director of Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement should serve as chairperson of the Animal Advisory Council, which is responsible for advising on animal-welfare matters involving the department?
9. Do you believe members of the Animal Advisory Council should be empowered to independently review information, ask questions, request records and data, raise concerns, and make recommendations regarding Animal Welfare & Enforcement operations, even when their conclusions or recommendations differ from those of department staff or County leadership?
10. Members of the Animal Advisory Council may need access to County records and data in order to evaluate animal-welfare issues, understand department operations, and make informed recommendations. When Council members request records reasonably necessary to perform their official advisory responsibilities, do you believe they should be required to personally pay Open Records Act fees to obtain those records?
11. When the Animal Advisory Council makes a formal recommendation to the Board of Commissioners or County administration, do you support requiring a documented response indicating whether the recommendation will be accepted, rejected, or further evaluated, along with the rationale for that decision?
12. When concerns about a County department are supported by public records, operational data, employee reports, audits, or other credible evidence, what responsibility do you believe members of the Board of Commissioners have to independently evaluate those concerns rather than relying solely on information provided by the department involved?

Section 3 - Transparency, Accountability & Independent Review

OVERVIEW:

Transparency and accountability are especially important when a government agency is responsible for the care, handling, medical treatment, and life-or-death decisions involving animals in County custody.

GAAA has advocated for greater transparency within Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement, including appropriate camera coverage in areas where animals are housed and handled, access to meaningful operational information and data, appropriate investigation of serious complaints, and clear accountability when policies, regulations, or standards of care are violated.

These concerns are informed in part by Gwinnett County's own records. A 2021 County internal investigation into complaints involving Animal Welfare employees substantiated multiple allegations, including findings related to excessive force involving animals, spraying occupied kennels, and toxic or bullying workplace conduct. The investigation also found that spraying occupied kennels with the warm/hot water being used violated Georgia Department of Agriculture regulations.

More recently, GAAA has raised concerns with County leadership regarding whether corrective measures resulting from prior findings were fully implemented and sustained.

Gwinnett County previously convened an Animal Welfare Task Force in 2012 to conduct a comprehensive review of the County's animal-welfare system and recommend improvements. More than a decade later, GAAA's review found that a number of significant recommendations had not been fully implemented or remained ongoing concerns. Given the issues that have emerged since that review, questions remain about whether an independent, comprehensive evaluation of current Animal Welfare & Enforcement operations is warranted.

[Link to 2012 Task Force Report](#)

[Link to 2025 Current State vs. 2012 Task Force Report](#)

[Link to 2021 Investigation Report](#)

[Link to 2026 Animal Welfare Allegations](#)

The following questions address the level of transparency, accountability, and independent review you believe should exist within Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement.

QUESTIONS:

13. Camera Coverage: Do you support appropriate camera coverage in areas of the Bill Atkinson Animal Welfare Center where animals are housed, handled, medically treated, and euthanized, with appropriate policies governing access, privacy, and record retention?

14. Investigation of Serious Complaints: When credible allegations involving animal mistreatment, violations of animal-welfare regulations, or serious employee misconduct are reported within Animal Welfare & Enforcement, do you support requiring a documented and impartial investigation with findings based on available evidence?

15. Employee Accountability: When an investigation substantiates that a County employee has mistreated an animal, violated an animal-welfare regulation, or committed other serious misconduct involving animals in County custody, do you support meaningful disciplinary action proportionate to the severity and circumstances of the violation?

16. Corrective Action and Follow-Through: When an investigation identifies policy failures, training deficiencies, workplace-culture concerns, or other systemic problems within a County department, do you support requiring a documented corrective-action plan and subsequent review to determine whether corrective measures were implemented and sustained?

17. Protection for Those Who Raise Concerns: Do you support policies that protect County employees, volunteers, Animal Advisory Council members, and others from retaliation when they raise legitimate animal-welfare, workplace, regulatory, or operational concerns in good faith?

18. Transparency Regarding Serious Complaints: While recognizing legitimate employee privacy and personnel protections, do you support greater public transparency regarding serious complaints involving the treatment of animals in County custody, including whether a complaint was investigated, whether allegations were substantiated, and whether corrective action was taken?

19. Independent Comprehensive Review or Audit: Do you support an independent, comprehensive review or audit of Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement's operations, policies, animal-care practices, staffing and training, medical services, euthanasia practices, enforcement, community programs, and performance outcomes?

20. Public Findings and Implementation: If such a review is conducted, do you support making its findings and recommendations publicly available and requiring the County to formally respond to the recommendations and report on implementation progress?

21. Operational and Performance Transparency: Do you support requiring Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement to regularly publish meaningful operational and outcome data that allows Commissioners and the public to evaluate shelter performance and identify trends over time?

Section 4 - Shelter Animal Care, Enrichment & Behavioral Welfare

OVERVIEW:

Animals housed in a shelter depend entirely on the County for their daily care, physical activity, enrichment, social interaction, and behavioral well-being. These are not only quality-of-life considerations. Prolonged confinement, limited activity, and inadequate enrichment can contribute to stress and behavioral deterioration, potentially making animals more difficult to adopt and complicating behavioral assessments.

In 2026, GAAA conducted an analysis of Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement records to better understand the amount of documented enrichment and out-of-kennel activity provided to dogs in County custody.

For May 2026, GAAA's review of records for 415 dogs in shelter care found:

- Across 4,935 shelter care-days, only 212 enrichment activities were documented — meaning documented enrichment occurred on approximately 4.3% of shelter care-days.
- Only 88 of 415 dogs (21.2%) had any documented enrichment activity during the month. Approximately 78.8% of dogs had no documented enrichment activity.
- Only 35 of 415 dogs (8.4%) had a documented outdoor leash walk during the month. Approximately 91.6% had no documented outdoor leash walk.
- More than 62% of all documented enrichment activities were performed by a single staff member, raising concerns about whether enrichment is consistently incorporated into routine shelter operations.

While recordkeeping may not capture every interaction an animal receives, the available documentation raises questions about whether animals are receiving consistent, meaningful enrichment and out-of-kennel activity and whether the County has adequate standards and systems for measuring that care.

[Link to GAAA's Full Enrichment Audit](#)

The following questions address the standards you believe Gwinnett County should maintain for the physical and behavioral welfare of animals in County custody.

QUESTIONS:

22. Minimum Standards for Enrichment and Exercise: Do you support establishing measurable minimum standards for appropriate exercise, enrichment, social interaction, and meaningful out-of-kennel activity for animals in County custody, based on the individual animal's health, behavior, and needs?

23. Documentation and Accountability for Daily Care: Do you support requiring consistent documentation of enrichment, exercise, and other meaningful out-of-kennel activity so that shelter management, Commissioners, and appropriate oversight bodies can evaluate whether established standards are being met?

24. Behavioral Assessments and Euthanasia Decisions: When a dog is being considered for euthanasia primarily because of behavioral concerns, do you support requiring a documented behavioral evaluation that considers, when available and appropriate, the animal's history, observations from multiple qualified sources, behavior outside of the kennel environment, the potential effects of kennel stress or barrier reactivity, and reassessment before a final decision is made?

25. Qualified Behavioral Expertise and Staff Training: Do you support providing sufficient training and access to qualified animal-behavior expertise to help shelter staff accurately assess behavior, recognize the effects of fear and kennel stress, implement appropriate behavior-support plans, and reduce preventable behavioral deterioration during an animal's stay?

26. Individualized Care for Long-Stay and At-Risk Animals: Animals experiencing extended shelter stays or showing signs of increasing fear, stress, or behavioral deterioration may require additional intervention. Do you support requiring individualized care or intervention plans for long-stay animals and animals showing significant signs of behavioral deterioration, which may include increased enrichment, exercise, foster placement, behavior support, medical evaluation, or other appropriate interventions?

27. Monitoring Shelter Animal Welfare: Beyond traditional outcome measures such as intake, adoption, and euthanasia numbers, do you support regularly evaluating and reporting measures related to the quality of life of animals while they are in County custody, including indicators such as enrichment, exercise, length of stay, and behavioral deterioration?

Section 5 - Veterinary & Medical Care

OVERVIEW:

Animals in County custody depend entirely on Gwinnett County to identify illness or injury, provide appropriate veterinary treatment, administer prescribed medications, monitor recovery, and obtain emergency care when necessary.

In January 2026, before Gwinnett County approved a new veterinary-services contract, an extensive review of shelter medical records documented recurring concerns involving medical monitoring and reassessment, medication administration and documentation, post-operative care, delayed diagnosis and escalation, disease prevention and infection control, veterinary coverage, and oversight of contracted veterinary services. The report recommended that the County seriously evaluate transitioning to a permanent in-house veterinary team to improve continuity of care, accountability, and access to timely treatment.

Despite these documented concerns, the County proceeded with a new contracted veterinary-services agreement. Subsequent review of 2026 medical and contract records has identified many of the same types of concerns under the new contract, including gaps in documented daily medical monitoring and follow-up, prescribed medications with no documented doses administered, and deficiencies in controlled-substance records and other contract requirements.

These recurring concerns raise a broader question about whether Gwinnett County's current contracted veterinary-care model provides sufficient continuity, oversight, and accountability — and whether the County is adequately verifying that the veterinary services it contracts and pays for are actually being performed.

GAAA supports developing permanent in-house veterinary capacity, including County-employed veterinary professionals, to provide direct medical oversight, greater continuity of care, stronger accountability, and timely access to treatment, while continuing to use outside veterinary providers for specialty, emergency, or additional services when needed.

[Link to Medical Oversight, Accountability & Risk Review — January 2026](#)

Review provided **before approval** of the new veterinary-services contract

[Link to Veterinary Services Contract Compliance Review - June 2026](#)

Review documenting concerns identified **after implementation** of the new contract

The following questions address the standards, resources, oversight, and veterinary-care model you believe Gwinnett County should maintain for animals in County custody.

QUESTIONS:

28. Minimum Standards for Medical Care: Do you support establishing and enforcing measurable minimum standards for veterinary care of animals in County custody, including timely medical assessment, treatment, administration and documentation of prescribed medications, appropriate monitoring and reassessment, and escalation of care when an animal's condition does not improve or worsens?

29. Emergency and After-Hours Veterinary Care: When an animal in County custody experiences a medical emergency or requires care beyond what can be provided at the shelter, do you support ensuring that staff have clear protocols and sufficient authority and resources to obtain timely emergency or specialty veterinary care based on the animal's medical needs?

30. Veterinary Contract Oversight and Accountability: When Gwinnett County contracts with an outside veterinary provider, do you support requiring measurable performance standards and routine compliance review to determine whether contracted services - including medical rounds, treatment, documentation, follow-up care, and other contractual responsibilities - are being provided as required?

31. Independent Review of Veterinary Performance: Do you support periodic review of the quality and effectiveness of veterinary services by an appropriately qualified party independent of the veterinary contractor, including review of medical records, treatment protocols, outcomes, and compliance with established standards?

32. In-House Veterinary Care: Do you support Gwinnett County establishing and funding permanent in-house veterinary positions, including veterinarians and veterinary technicians, to provide routine medical care and oversight for animals in County custody, while continuing to use outside veterinary providers for specialty, emergency, or additional services when needed?

Section 6 - Euthanasia, Rescue Opportunities & Lifesaving Decisions

OVERVIEW:

Euthanasia is one of the most consequential responsibilities of a public animal shelter. While euthanasia may sometimes be necessary because of severe medical suffering or significant public-safety concerns, GAAA believes that animals should receive reasonable lifesaving opportunities whenever circumstances allow and that euthanasia decisions should be consistent, documented, and transparent.

GAAA has advocated for stronger safeguards surrounding euthanasia decisions, including meaningful advance notice for animals at risk, opportunities for rescue, foster, or adoption placement, consideration of available information before behavioral euthanasia decisions, and clear documentation of the reasons animals are euthanized.

The County's policies should also distinguish urgent cases involving severe suffering or immediate safety concerns from non-emergency situations in which additional time or intervention may provide an opportunity for a live outcome.

The following questions address the safeguards, transparency, and lifesaving opportunities you believe should apply before animals in Gwinnett County custody are euthanized.

QUESTIONS:

33. Advance Notice / Last Call: Do you support a written policy requiring meaningful advance public and rescue notification before non-emergency euthanasia whenever circumstances permit, providing a reasonable opportunity for adoption, foster, or rescue placement?

34. Social Media Notification for At-Risk Animals: When an animal is at risk of non-emergency euthanasia, do you support requiring Animal Welfare & Enforcement to actively and prominently notify the public through its current social media channels, including a new or clearly identifiable post that communicates the animal's at-risk status and the timeframe for action, rather than relying solely on updates to older posts or existing animal listings?

35. Rescue, Foster or Adoption Interest and Extensions: When a qualified rescue, foster, or adopter is actively working to save an animal scheduled for euthanasia, do you support requiring the County to provide a reasonable extension to complete the placement when kennel space is available, rather than proceeding with euthanasia, unless the animal is experiencing severe medical suffering requiring immediate humane euthanasia or presents an immediate and serious public-safety risk?

36. Euthanasia Decision-Making and Safeguards: Before a non-emergency euthanasia decision is made, do you support requiring a documented review of the animal's complete history and circumstances - including prior behavior and observations, changes in behavior during shelter confinement, medical status, length of stay, enrichment and out-of-kennel opportunities, foster or volunteer observations when available, interventions attempted, and available rescue, foster or adoption options - rather than relying primarily on recent negative behavioral observations?

37. Shelter Capacity and Euthanasia Risk: When the shelter is operating at or near capacity, do you support requiring proactive measures to reduce euthanasia risk, including expanded adoption promotion, rescue outreach, foster placement, temporary overflow capacity, and other reasonable lifesaving alternatives before animals become at risk of euthanasia?

38. Public Reporting of Euthanasia Outcomes: Do you support regular public reporting of euthanasia outcomes that includes the number of animals euthanized, the primary recorded reason for each euthanasia, and contributing circumstances - including shelter overcrowding or capacity pressures when applicable - so the public and Commissioners can accurately understand the factors influencing euthanasia outcomes?

39. Review of Euthanasia Trends and Contributing Factors: Do you support requiring Animal Welfare & Enforcement and County leadership to periodically review euthanasia trends, including not only the recorded reason for euthanasia but also potential contributing factors such as shelter population, length of stay, behavioral deterioration, medical needs, staffing and resource limitations, and availability of rescue, foster, or other placement options?

Section 7 - Open Intake, Shelter Capacity & the County Safety Net

OVERVIEW:

As Gwinnett County's public animal shelter, Animal Welfare & Enforcement serves as a critical safety net for stray, abandoned, lost, injured, and owner-surrendered animals in the community.

GAAA believes Gwinnett County should maintain an open-intake shelter system capable of accepting animals that need County shelter services rather than controlling shelter population by restricting or denying intake. When animals that need shelter cannot be accepted, the need does not simply disappear.

Animals may remain loose, abandoned, or otherwise without safe placement in the community, where they can be injured or killed by vehicles, suffer from extreme heat or cold, go without adequate food, water, shelter, or medical care, reproduce and contribute to additional homeless-animal populations, or create public-safety concerns for residents, motorists, other animals, and the community.

Preventing unnecessary shelter intake remains an important part of a successful animal-welfare system. Programs such as pet reunification, accessible spay/neuter, owner-retention assistance, foster care, rescue partnerships, and other community resources can help animals remain safely in their homes or communities. These programs should reduce the number of animals that need shelter services — not replace access to the public shelter for animals that genuinely need it.

When shelter capacity becomes strained, GAAA believes the County should address the underlying capacity challenge through adequate staffing and resources, expanded foster and rescue partnerships, adoption and reunification efforts, emergency and overflow housing, and appropriate expansion of shelter infrastructure rather than relying on restricted intake or unnecessary euthanasia to manage available space.

Gwinnett County's continued population growth also requires long-term planning for animal-welfare infrastructure. Shelter capacity should be evaluated not simply by the number of available kennels, but by whether the County has sufficient space, staffing, and resources to appropriately house, medically treat, isolate, exercise, enrich, and care for the animals it serves.

[Link to GAAA Managed Intake Analysis](#)

The following questions address the responsibility you believe Gwinnett County has to provide shelter services and maintain sufficient capacity to meet the community's needs.

QUESTIONS:

40. Open-Intake Shelter: Gwinnett County Animal Welfare & Enforcement currently operates as a managed-intake shelter, meaning access to shelter intake may be restricted or delayed. Do you support transitioning to an open-intake public shelter that accepts stray, abandoned, and owner-surrendered animals needing County shelter services, rather than restricting or denying intake in ways that may leave animals without safe placement and shift animal-welfare and public-safety risks back into the community?

41. Prevention Without Restricting Access: Do you support investing in programs that reduce unnecessary shelter intake - including owner-retention assistance, pet reunification, foster and rescue partnerships, and other prevention resources - while maintaining access to County shelter services for animals that need them?

42. Emergency and Capacity Contingency Planning: Do you support requiring Gwinnett County to maintain a proactive capacity plan for periods when the shelter approaches or exceeds normal capacity, including access to temporary or emergency overflow housing, expanded foster placement, rescue outreach, adoption promotion, reunification efforts, and other appropriate strategies so animals can continue to receive safe care without restricting intake or unnecessarily euthanizing animals?

43. Long-Term Shelter Capacity and Infrastructure: Do you support a comprehensive assessment of whether the Bill Atkinson Animal Welfare Center's current capacity and infrastructure are sufficient to meet Gwinnett County's present and projected needs, including appropriate animal housing, medical and isolation space, enrichment and exercise areas, and other operational needs?

44. Expanding Shelter Capacity: If the existing facility does not provide sufficient capacity to appropriately serve Gwinnett County's animal population, do you support investing in additional capacity - including expansion of the existing shelter, development of an additional shelter facility, permanent or emergency overflow capacity, or other necessary infrastructure - rather than relying on restricted intake or euthanasia to address insufficient space?

Section 8 - Prevention, Population Control & Responsible Pet Ownership

OVERVIEW:

A sustainable animal-welfare system cannot rely on sheltering alone. Reducing the number of animals entering the shelter requires addressing preventable causes of intake before animals become homeless, abandoned, surrendered, or part of an unplanned litter.

GAAA supports greater County investment in prevention, including accessible spay/neuter services, responsible breeding measures, expanded community-cat/TNR programs, pet identification and reunification initiatives, and resources that help owners safely keep their animals when temporary challenges can be resolved.

These programs should complement — not replace — an open-intake public shelter for animals that genuinely need County shelter services.

[Link to GAAA Community Cats & TNVR Analysis](#)

The following questions address the role you believe Gwinnett County should play in preventing animal homelessness, reducing unwanted litters, and reducing unnecessary shelter intake.

QUESTIONS:

45. Accessible and Affordable Spay/Neuter: Do you support Gwinnett County funding and expanding accessible, affordable spay/neuter programs for residents, including targeted programs for communities and animal populations contributing disproportionately to shelter intake?

46. Irresponsible and Backyard Breeding: Do you support strengthening Gwinnett County ordinances and enforcement strategies to address irresponsible and backyard breeding that contributes to unwanted litters, animal neglect, and shelter intake?

47. Retail Sale of Commercially Bred Animals: Do you support prohibiting the retail sale of dogs, cats, and rabbits sourced from commercial breeders while allowing pet stores to partner with legitimate animal shelters and rescue organizations to offer animals for adoption?

48. Community Cats and TNR: Do you support expanding Gwinnett County's Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and community-cat programs, including increasing access to available TNR services and addressing barriers that result in County-funded TNR capacity going unused while community need exists?

49. Lost-Pet Reunification and Microchipping: Do you support expanding pet-identification, microchipping, and field-reunification initiatives that help lost animals return directly to their families and reduce unnecessary shelter intake?

50. Owner Retention and Surrender Prevention Resources: Do you support investing in owner-retention and surrender-prevention programs that address solvable reasons animals are surrendered - such as temporary financial hardship, access to veterinary care, pet food, or behavioral assistance - while maintaining access to the County shelter when surrender remains necessary?

Section 9 - Animal Protection Ordinances & Enforcement

OVERVIEW:

Animal-protection laws are only effective when they adequately address the conditions animals face in the community and are consistently enforced.

Gwinnett County Commissioners have the authority to adopt and amend local animal-control ordinances and to provide the staffing, resources, training, and funding necessary for Animal Welfare & Enforcement to enforce those ordinances.

GAAA believes County ordinances should provide meaningful protections against animal neglect, cruelty, abandonment, unsafe confinement, irresponsible breeding, and other conditions that threaten animal welfare or public safety. Existing ordinances should be periodically evaluated and strengthened when gaps or changing community needs are identified.

Effective enforcement is equally important. Residents should be able to report legitimate animal-welfare concerns and have confidence that complaints will be appropriately evaluated, documented, and addressed consistently.

The following questions address the animal-protection standards and enforcement system you believe Gwinnett County should maintain.

QUESTIONS:

51. Strengthening Animal-Protection Ordinances: Do you support reviewing and strengthening Gwinnett County's animal-protection ordinances when existing laws are inadequate to address animal neglect, cruelty, abandonment, unsafe confinement, or other conditions that threaten animal welfare or public safety?

52. Protection from Extreme Weather and Unsafe Conditions: Do you support strengthening and enforcing County standards requiring animals kept outdoors to have adequate protection from extreme heat and cold and access to appropriate shelter, water, and other necessities necessary to protect their health and safety?

53. Consistent Enforcement and Follow-Up: Do you support requiring consistent enforcement of animal-welfare laws and ordinances, including appropriate documentation, investigation, follow-up, and corrective or enforcement action when violations are identified?

54. Animal Enforcement Staffing, Training & Resources: Do you support providing Animal Welfare & Enforcement with sufficient staffing, training, equipment, and other resources necessary to investigate complaints, enforce animal-protection laws, respond to animal-related public-safety concerns, and provide appropriate follow-up?

Section 10 - Volunteers, Foster & Rescue Partnerships, and Community Access

OVERVIEW:

Volunteers, foster families, rescue organizations, and community members can significantly expand the capacity of a public animal shelter while improving the quality of life and placement opportunities for animals in County custody.

GAAA's review of Gwinnett's volunteer program identified significant concerns regarding participation and retention. In 2025, volunteers contributed approximately 2,262 hours at Gwinnett Animal Welfare & Enforcement, compared with approximately 18,000 hours at DeKalb County, 13,000 hours at Fulton County, and 4,800 hours at Hall County. Approximately 68% of Gwinnett volunteers recorded fewer than five hours of service.

Current and former volunteers have described lengthy waits for orientation, service-hour requirements that delay participation in programs such as Dog Day Out, restrictions on meaningful interaction with animals, and policies that make it difficult for volunteers to help promote animals for adoption or rescue. Some Gwinnett residents have chosen to volunteer at shelters in neighboring counties where they report being able to contribute more easily.

GAAA has also received concerning feedback regarding volunteer culture. Former volunteers have described feeling treated as an inconvenience rather than a partner, excessively monitored, discouraged from raising concerns or offering suggestions, and fearful that speaking critically could jeopardize their ability to continue helping animals.

Experienced volunteers, including volunteers who contributed significant numbers of service hours, have left the program after reporting negative interactions or treatment.

A successful volunteer program should maintain appropriate training and safety standards while creating an environment in which volunteers are respected as community partners, their time and skills are effectively utilized, constructive feedback is welcomed, and volunteers can raise legitimate concerns without fear of retaliation or loss of access.

Foster families and rescue organizations provide additional lifesaving capacity by moving animals out of the shelter environment and into temporary or permanent placement. Strong partnerships, timely communication, and accessible programs can reduce shelter crowding and improve outcomes.

[Link to GAAA Volunteer Engagement Analysis](#)

[Link to GAAA Volunteer Program Analysis — Participation, Retention & Barriers](#)

[Link to GAAA Volunteer Experiences — Culture, Treatment & Retaliation Concerns](#)

The following questions address how you believe Gwinnett County should strengthen community participation in its animal-welfare system.

QUESTIONS:

55. Volunteer Program Barriers: Do you support reviewing and reforming Gwinnett's volunteer program to reduce unnecessary barriers to participation, including lengthy orientation wait times and service-hour requirements that delay volunteers from participating in programs or providing meaningful assistance?

56. Competency-Based Volunteer Opportunities: Do you support developing volunteer training and qualification requirements based primarily on demonstrated competency and safety rather than arbitrary service-hour thresholds before trained volunteers can participate in activities such as dog walking, enrichment, socialization, animal promotion, and Dog Day Out?

57. Volunteer Culture and Treatment: Do you support establishing clear standards requiring volunteers to be treated professionally and respectfully as community partners, with constructive feedback and concerns welcomed rather than discouraged?

58. Protection from Retaliation: Do you support policies protecting volunteers from retaliation, removal, restriction of animal access, or other adverse treatment solely because they raise legitimate concerns, provide constructive criticism, or advocate in good faith for animals in County custody?

59. Volunteer Recruitment, Retention and Utilization: Do you support establishing measurable goals for volunteer recruitment, retention, hours contributed, and meaningful utilization, with regular evaluation and corrective action when participation or retention indicates that the volunteer program is not effectively engaging the community?

60. Foster and Rescue Partnerships: Do you support expanding and adequately resourcing foster and rescue partnerships, including reducing unnecessary administrative barriers, improving communication and coordination, and increasing opportunities for animals to leave the shelter through foster or qualified rescue placement?

61. Shelter Hours and Community Access: Do you support expanding shelter hours to provide meaningful evening and weekend access for residents to adopt and reclaim animals, volunteer, foster, and participate in other shelter programs?

Section 11 - Budget Accountability, Performance & Commissioner Leadership

OVERVIEW:

Many of the animal-welfare improvements addressed throughout this survey require not only policy changes, but adequate funding, measurable goals, meaningful oversight, and sustained leadership from the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners.

The Board of Commissioners approves the County budget and ultimately determines the resources available for animal shelter operations, veterinary care, Animal Enforcement, prevention programs, staffing, shelter capacity and infrastructure, foster and volunteer programs, technology, and other animal-welfare services.

Funding alone, however, does not guarantee successful outcomes. GAAA believes programs receiving taxpayer funding should have clearly defined objectives and meaningful performance measures so Commissioners and residents can determine whether programs are working as intended and identify when changes are needed.

Commissioners also have an oversight responsibility. When credible concerns, operational data, audits, advisory bodies, employees, volunteers, residents, or community organizations identify potential problems, elected officials should independently evaluate the information, ask questions, seek appropriate answers, and follow up on corrective action rather than relying solely on assurances from the department being overseen.

Animal welfare should be treated as a meaningful responsibility of County government, with the same expectations for accountability, transparency, performance, and responsible use of taxpayer resources applied to other County services.

The following questions address the role you believe Commissioners should play in funding and overseeing Gwinnett's animal-welfare system.

QUESTIONS:

62. Animal Welfare as a County Budget Priority: Do you support making animal welfare a meaningful County budget priority and providing appropriate funding for veterinary care, accessible spay/neuter programs, TNR and community-cat programs, other prevention initiatives, Animal Enforcement, enrichment, staffing, shelter capacity and infrastructure, volunteer and foster programs, technology, and other programs demonstrated to improve animal-welfare outcomes?

63. Performance Measures and Public Accountability: Do you support requiring major County-funded animal-welfare programs and initiatives to have measurable objectives, meaningful performance measures, and publicly reported results so Commissioners and residents can determine whether taxpayer-funded programs are achieving their intended outcomes?

64. Commissioner Review of Animal-Welfare Performance: Do you support regular review by the Board of Commissioners of key animal-welfare performance measures, including shelter intake and outcomes, euthanasia and contributing

circumstances, length of stay, shelter population and capacity, medical care, enrichment, volunteer participation, prevention programs, enforcement activity, and other indicators necessary to identify emerging problems and evaluate performance?

65. Responding to Documented Concerns: When residents, employees, volunteers, advisory bodies, professionals, or community organizations provide credible documentation, data, or recommendations identifying potential animal-welfare problems, do you commit to ensuring those concerns receive acknowledgment, appropriate evaluation, and a substantive response rather than being ignored or referred back to the department without meaningful follow-up?

66. Commissioner Responsibility for Oversight: Do you agree that members of the Board of Commissioners have an independent responsibility to oversee Gwinnett's animal-welfare system, ask difficult questions, examine evidence and data, and pursue corrective action when credible information indicates that policies, programs, leadership, or practices are failing to adequately protect animals or serve residents?

67. Commitment to Act: If evidence demonstrates that an animal-welfare policy, program, practice, or use of County resources is not producing acceptable outcomes, do you commit to using your authority as a Commissioner - including policy, budget, oversight, and legislative authority - to pursue meaningful and measurable improvements?

68. Your Animal Welfare Priorities: What animal-welfare issue or issues do you believe Gwinnett County should prioritize during your term that were not adequately addressed in this survey, and what actions would you propose?