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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - August 21, 2024

Walter Clark Legal Group files legal action against Riverside County Department of Animal Services and its Director, Erin Gettis, for violations of the Hayden Act which protects animals in shelters

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Press Conference announcing the filing of the legal action will be held Thursday, August 22, 2024, at 9:30 a.m., at the offices of Walter Clark Legal Group, 71861 Highway 111, Rancho Mirage, CA 92270

(Rancho Mirage, California) A Petition for Writ of Mandate and Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief was filed yesterday in Riverside County Superior Court by four long-term residents of the County who, collectively, have spent over a half-century devoting countless hours to animal advocacy and welfare, animal rescue, shelter management, animal safety and no kill policies.

The lawsuit was filed against Riverside County Department of Animal Services (“RCDAS”), its Director, Erin Gettis, and the County of Riverside. Attorneys Walter T. Clark and Dan C. Bolton represent the Petitioners in the case.

The purpose of this litigation is to end the inertia, inaction and inhumanity at RCDAS, and to remove the current Director with a proactive, compassionate leader who works with the community and rescue organizations rather than taking the easy approach. As Mr. Bolton states: “Dogs and cats deserve to go out the front door to a new beginning, not the back door to a rendering facility or landfill.”

In 2023, Best Friends Animal Society, a nationally respected organization with particular expertise in shelter statistics, stated that RCDAS facilities killed more animals than any other reporting shelter in the United States in 2022. Indeed, 24,000 animals have been killed in the last two years at RCDAS—roughly 1,000 each month.

The provisions of the Hayden Act, enacted over 25 years ago, are codified throughout various Codes and state: “It is the policy of this state that no adoptable animal should be euthanized if it can be adopted into a suitable home.” And, even animals that are not technically “adoptable” should not be euthanized “if they could become adoptable with reasonable efforts.”

The Hayden Act is derided by the Director of RCDAS—who had no previous experience in animal safety, shelter management, or overseeing a \$39,000,000 budget before being hired—as “legalese” and chooses to ignore its clear mandate. The disturbing results of this approach are disdain for the health and safety of animals in the custody of RCDAS, disinterest in working with the community and rescue organizations to place animals in homes, inertia in moving to adopt no kill policies, and a haphazard focus on killing, rather than saving, dogs and cats. This must stop.

Mr. Clark notes: “This is a ground-breaking case that seeks to overhaul Riverside County animal services through comprehensive court-ordered relief consistent with the Hayden Act as well as the substantive recommendations of local animal advocates who have fought tirelessly for change.”

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Media representatives are invited to attend the press conference and are asked to RSVP to Ms. Romero or Mr. Asher for further details.