

DISCONTINUE FREE OUT OF COUNTY ADOPTION EVENTS

Subject

Policy Recommendation to Discontinue Out-of-County and Fee-Waived Dog Adoption Events

Contact and/or Presenter Information

David Daniels, ASAB Member

Action Requested

Motion that the Animal Services Advisory Board (ASAB) recommend that the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners direct Manatee County Animal Welfare (MCAW) to discontinue the policy and practice of transporting and providing county-sheltered dogs to out-of-county adoption events, specifically those utilizing fee-waived ("free") adoption structures.

Discussion Points

1. Context of Recent Events

Manatee County Animal Welfare (MCAW) transports animals to out-of-county promotional events, including a recent fee-waived adoption event in Plant City (Polk County). Although the goal of reducing shelter populations is understandable, exporting animals for zero-cost adoptions poses significant risks that ultimately outweigh the benefits.

2. Free Adoption vs Responsible Pet Ownership

Adopting a canine companion introduces substantial, immediate, and long-term financial responsibilities—including high-quality nutrition, routine preventative veterinary care, emergency medical treatments, and local licensing.

- **The Risk of No-Cost Enticement:** Implementing a fee-waived or "free" adoption model removes the minimal financial barrier that naturally gauges an adopter's baseline economic readiness.
- **Consequences:** Removing adoption fees increases the probability that a dog will enter a household that cannot realistically absorb the recurring costs of proper animal care. This often leads to medical neglect, poor living conditions, or a rapid surrender back into a shelter system—often outside our county where we lose the ability to track the animal's welfare.

3. Proximity Risks: Dog Fighting and the Threat of "Bait Dogs"

The most alarming risk of zero-barrier, zero-cost out-of-county adoptions is the ease of access it provides to bad actors. In "free" adoption promotions, dogs can be acquired rapidly with minimal expense or scrutiny.

- **The "Bait Dog" Threat:** Shelter dogs adopted out under these conditions face a heightened risk of being acquired for illicit activities, specifically as "bait dogs" used to train mild-mannered or aggressive animals for dog fighting rings.

- **Evidence Collected:** A total of 69 dogs (including eight puppies) were seized. At the Fort Meade location, detectives found an indoor fighting ring stained with blood, alongside heavy chains attached to logs used to forcefully strengthen the dogs' necks. At the Bartow property, 41 dogs were found alongside specialized treadmills used to build canine endurance.
- **The Outcome:** Grant, who had a prior felony conviction and a 2006 court order explicitly forbidding him from owning dogs, was convicted of 84 counts of animal cruelty. In November 2015, he received a landmark sentence of 20 years in prison followed by 30 years of probation, alongside a lifetime ban on animal ownership. This stood out nationally as an exceptionally strict penalty for animal abuse. Detailed coverage can be found via [WTSP 2014 Coverage](#) and [First Coast News](#).

Multi-County Narcotics and Dogfighting Network (July/August 2024)

A massive multi-agency investigation exposed a highly organized network that tied Central Florida areas, including the broader region surrounding Pinellas and neighboring inland counties, to extensive dogfighting and drug trafficking.

- **The Operation:** Conducted by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and the St. Petersburg Police Department, the bust resulted in the arrest of 13 individuals and the rescue of over 111 dogs.
- **Evidence Collected:** Law enforcement seized 54 pounds of methamphetamine, 21 pounds of cocaine, fentanyl, heroin, and specialized equipment used to restrain female dogs for forced breeding. The perpetrators utilized illicit drug profits to fund and breed the dogs, forcing them to fight for illegal gambling entertainment. The animals, including heavily bred females and young puppies, were recovered from oppressive backyard setups and filthy crates.
- **The Outcome:** The ASPCA coordinated the massive emergency relocation of the rescued animals to behavioral rehabilitation centers and regional shelters, including the [Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League](#) to receive long-term care and placement.