

# Opinion: State SPCA is doing the job it's supposed to do

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The Record's and NorthJersey.com's recent editorial, "State SPCA focused on traffic, not animals," completely misses the mark and fails to provide the true facts as it relates to the form and function of the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NJSPCA). Instead, The Record blindly accepts the New Jersey State Commission of Investigation's (SCI) most recent report about the NJSPCA as pure fact. Allow me set the record straight.

The editorial found it "disturbing" that the NJSPCA has allegedly morphed into an organization with a "wannabe cop" culture rather than an organization focused on protecting animals. Nothing could be further from the truth.

NJSPCA personnel are not "wannabe cops" as the SCI has attempted to the brand the agency. In fact, the exact opposite is true. NJSPCA agents and officers undergo training developed by the Department of Law & Public Safety, approved by the Police Training

Commission (PTC) and their armed officers are commissioned every two years by the State Police.

Whether one agrees with intent of the Legislature or not, the NJSPCA was created by the Legislature in 1868 as a public law enforcement agency to enforce Title IV – New Jersey’s animal cruelty statutes. Since 1868 the NJSPCA has performed this function at no cost to taxpayers.

The fact is the NJSPCA receives approximately 5,000 animal cruelty complaints each year. Since January 2015, the NJSPCA has issued approximately 1,250 summonses for animal cruelty, has rescued thousands of animals and has successfully resolved thousands of complaints by educating humans about what is animal cruelty and what is not.

**Wannabe:** ['Wannabe cops' neglect animal-cruelty laws while stopping traffic, investigation finds](#)

**Editorial:** [Editorial: State SPCA focused on traffic, not animals](#)

While the SCI concluded that the NJSPCA is dominated by a “wannabe cop” culture, at no time did the SCI spend any time with NJSPCA personnel in the field conducting investigations. How the SCI can conclude the NJSPCA is populated by “wannabe cops” is laughable.

The Record’s editorial board was apparently shocked to learn that a statewide law enforcement agency created by the Legislature in 1868 owns and operates vehicles equipped with police lights, software devices and, in fact, some NJSPCA personnel are authorized to carry firearms when enforcing the law. How else would The Record suggest the NJSPCA execute its legislative mandate? Take Uber, public transit or bicycles to respond to 5,000 complaints? The editorial board should be shocked that the State of New Jersey has not provided one dollar in funding in 150 years to support the NJSPCA.

The fact is NJSPCA personnel work in dangerous areas throughout the state on routine cases in crime-ridden neighborhoods at odd hours of the day and night. NJSPCA personnel work on routine cases involving improper shelter to complex cases involving dog fighting or cock fighting, blood sport games typically associated with violent gangs, illegal guns, gambling and drugs.

The editorial alleges that the NJSPCA has diverted its attention from animals to “traffic stops,” yet no evidence is presented by the SCI or the editorial to back those claims up.

For the record, the NJSPCA does not have the authority to conduct traffic stops, nor has the NJSPCA ever issued a summonses for traffic violations.

Unfortunately, The Record's editorial board blindly accepts the SCI's claim that the NJSPCA failed to respond to animal cruelty complaints in a timely manner. The fact is the SCI reviewed a small sample of 120 cases out of the 5,000 cases the NJSPCA handles each year and based its "finding" on those 120 cases. The SCI's methodology was flawed and its finding is without merit.

With respect to "exorbitant legal fees," while the NJSPCA is in fact a public agency and the Attorney General's Office has denied repeated requests to assign a Deputy Attorney General (DAG), that has not stopped us from making the requests. With no state assistance and without the assignment of a DAG, NJSPCA had no choice but to retain outside counsel. More importantly, 90 percent of the litigation the NJSPCA is involved with is the direct result of the NJSPCA enforcing the requirements of the SPCA Act of 2006 as they relate to County SPCA compliance and charters.

Finally, there is The Record's editorial's recognition that transferring the NJSPCA authority to local police departments may not be an easy answer. The editorial should be commended for its measured approach. Transferring the NJSPCA's authority to county and local police was suggested in 2000 by the SCI, debated ad nauseam in 2002 when Gov. Jim McGreevey's Animal Welfare Task Force was released, and once again during committee hearings and passage of the SPCA Act of 2006. Throughout these debates, county and local law enforcement had a seat at the table and have been unwilling to assume the NJSPCA functions.

We look forward to future debates and working in concert with all stakeholders to strengthen NJ's advocacy efforts for the safety and well-being of animals.

*Steve Shatkin is the president of the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.*