

**ANIMAL WELFARE WATCH ONTARIO (AWWO) – ONE STRONG VOICE FOR ANIMALS
MEDIA RELEASE**

ANIMAL WELFARE WATCH CO-FOUNDER MEETS WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Toronto – January 22, 2019 Animal Welfare Watch Ontario's co-founder Brenda Thompson met today in Toronto with minister's and ministry staff at the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (MCSCS). MCSCS administers the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) Act, the province's animal welfare law.

"I think we got our points across and the people I spoke to were both attentive and clearly concerned," says Thompson. "I explained to them that, since the recent Ontario Superior Court decision, the protection of animals in Ontario has rapidly deteriorated, even with the one-year grace period before that decision takes effect." On January 2, 2019, the court decided the OSPCA's policing powers should be removed as they are unconstitutional, stating that law enforcement should not be carried out by an unaccountable private organization. The decision will take effect in one year to give the province an opportunity to implement a new animal welfare system. The province has until February 1, 2019 to appeal the decision.

AWWO has received information that despite the grace period and despite the possibility the decision will be appealed, the OSPCA has cut their front-line services again. While AWWO has been concerned about the poor quality of service from the OSPCA for some time, there has been a further dramatic decline in OSPCA operations just since the January 2 Superior Court decision. The OSPCA has refused to investigate cruelty complaints, they've lost key investigators and they have failed to provide their remaining investigators with clear direction on the effect of the court decision.

"The OSPCA is putting animals at risk by behaving as if the court decision took effect immediately," says Mike Zimmerman, AWWO's other co-founder. "It's worrisome enough that the government only has a year to put a new system in place, but if the decision is appealed, it could be another year or two before we find out if the ruling will stand and it's only then – if the appeal is rejected – that the one-year grace period would start. Animals need protection now and right through any transition period to a new provincial animal welfare system.

Thompson explains that her meeting at MCSCS was very positive. "The officials I met with understand what's at stake here," she says. "Essentially, Ontario is now the only province without a functioning animal welfare system. The really bad apples out there such as puppy and kitten mill operators and others know as well as we do that the OSPCA is crumbling. It's likely they'll take advantage of the situation and animals will suffer. I took the opportunity today to ask some key questions and I made sure the people at MCSCS know that people who care about animals, which includes most Ontarians, will want to hear the answers to those questions as soon as possible."

The questions posed by Thompson in the meeting today included:

- **Will the provincial government be appealing the January 2 Superior Court decision that declared the OSPCA's policing authority to be unconstitutional?**
 - This decision will dramatically affect the timeline for change. AWWO contends the decision should not be appealed and the transition to a new animal welfare system should proceed as quickly as possible.
- **Will MCSCS take steps immediately to implement a transition strategy?**
 - The priority in any scenario is that animals receive adequate protection from harm. Given the unpredictable timeline for change and the further deterioration of OSPCA's services, AWWO contends it is crucial that a transition strategy be implemented by the government as soon as possible. AWWO has made suggestions as to how this can be done.
- **Will MCSCS suspend funding to the OSPCA and divert that money to a transition strategy?**
 - The current Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) between MCSCS and the OSPCA calls for another \$5.75 million dollars to be paid to the OSPCA by March 31, 2019. The TPA states the provision of province-wide coverage is the key requirement the OSPCA must fulfill to receive the money, but the OSPCA has not made good on that requirement for some time. AWWO contends that money could be better spent supporting a transition strategy to the new system.
- **Will the Minister of MCSCS take steps to annul the current operating bylaw of the OSPCA?**
 - This is the bylaw that eliminated board elections and makes the OSPCA completely unaccountable. The Minister of MCSCS has the authority under the OSPCA Act to annul OSPCA bylaws. AWWO contends the Minister should annul this bylaw and require that a new bylaw be presented that restores accountability to the OSPCA and commits the organization to assisting with the transition to the new animal welfare system.

"Most of all," says Thompson, "I wanted to impress on the government that AWWO is ready to help them move forward. We are a group of Ontarians who care deeply about the animals that live among us and we are also committed to providing practical and well-informed information and advice to the government so good decisions can be made and carried out. We want to be involved and, on behalf of our more than 2000 members, we look forward to our next meeting with MCSCS in approximately four to six weeks."

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