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September 4, 2012

Attention: Austin Public Safety Commission Members

Last month, DogsBite.org presented information to this commission from a 5-year review of Austin dog bite data (2007-2011). We were concerned then, and remain so today, about a 35% rise in dog bites from 2009-2011 that coincided with the city's formal adoption of a No-Kill policy in 2010. High volume adoptions were already underway in 2009.

On August 14, Austin Animal Services (AAS) produced a report in defense of the No-Kill policy. The report raised enough questions that DogsBite.org has produced our own response.

DogsBite.org Response Highlights

- The report uses misleading chart lines that do not follow any known trendline methodology. DogsBite.org rebuilt these charts showing "actual" trendlines.
- The report attempts to show that a 4% rise in Travis County population from 2009 to 2011 explains a 35% rise in dog bites during the same period.
- The report does not measure injury occurrences per population of 100,000 (incidence rate). DogsBite.org calculated the incidence rate in our response.
- The average incidence rate of dog bites in Travis County over the 12-year period is 106.7. Coming out of 2009, the incidence rate was 106.5, just below this average. By 2011, the incidence rate shot up to 138.
- Lastly, Figure 4 from the report potentially excludes the highest risk of biting dogs that are *transferred* to rescue groups prior to adoption. Thus, future bites from these dogs would not be attributed to dogs adopted out by AAS.

Recommendations

- Clarifying Figure 4 is critical, particularly concerning Austin Pets Alive! that is under contract by the city to take in the highest risk biting dogs.
- As always, we support a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance. Over the holiday weekend, AAS offered "free" adoptions as the shelter is "severely overcapacity" *again*.¹
- We also recommend amending § 3-1-29 of the Animal Regulation code so that sterilization is mandatory after the first impoundment instead of after the third.

I thank you for your attention on this matter.

Colleen Lynn
President and Founder
DogsBite.org

¹ This Labor Day Weekend All Adoption Fees Waived at the Austin Animal Center. (Retrieved Sept. 3, 2012) <http://www.austintexas.gov/news/labor-day-weekend-all-adoption-fees-waived-austin-animal-center>

DogsBite.org Response to AAS

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Introduction

On August 17, DogsBite.org received notice that Austin Animal Services (AAS) had responded to our 5-year review of dog bite data. The paragraphs forwarded to us in an email, however, were incomplete. On August 21, still confused by some of the language sent to us, particularly "salival contact" being attributed to a "dog bite," we performed a Google Search on these two terms. Of the entire Internet, only two results came back, one being a report by Austin Animal Services.

This peculiar web search is how we discovered the August 14 report at all.²

Expected Findings in 5-Year Review

What DogsBite.org expected to find in its 5-year review of Austin dog bite data was two-fold: Dog bites are rising and pit bulls are the leading biters. That's exactly what we found. What was unexpected was discovering a 35% increase in dog bites between 2009 and 2011, which coincided with the city's adoption of a No-Kill policy. Also unexpected was learning that pet owners in Austin are not subject to any licensing fees. The city ended this revenue program in 2008/2009.

Nothing in the August 14 report by AAS refutes these findings by DogsBite.org.

Austin Animal Services Report

In a report that we characterize as greatly minimizing dog bite-related injuries, it must noted that in the opening sentence *and* the final paragraph, AAS stresses that dog bite reports include "salival contact" with a dog (aka rare rabies exposure) and therefore are not a reliable metric of injurious acts by dogs. This minimization quickly leads into the first chart with a misleading red dotted line that represents no known trendline methodology, but best suits the claim of AAS. Reproducing the chart with a linear trendline shows that dog bites in 2011 surge above the expected forecast.

According to AAS, the Travis County growth increase by 4% from 2009 to 2011 explains the 35% rise in dog bites during the same period.

AAS starts the misleading dotted line at 2003, which is part of a subgroup of perhaps anomaly years (2001 to 2005) that show a decreasing number of dog bites, despite continued annual growth in Travis County in the same period. Starting the line during this subgroup is questionable. Notably, the reducing years occurred under longtime director Dorinda Pulliam, pressed to step-aside in 2010 for not being "aggressive enough about reducing the so-called kill rate."³

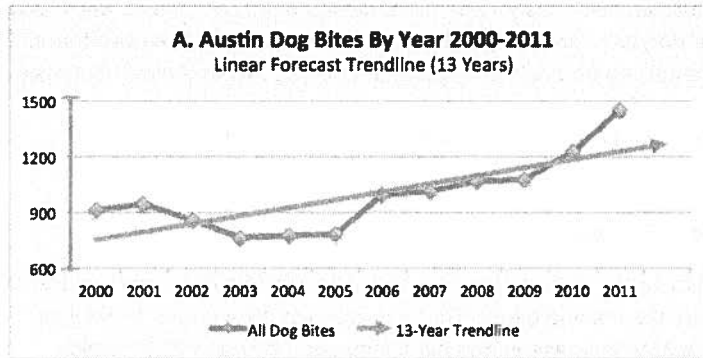
Please view related charts A, B and C on the following page.

² http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Animal_Services/Response_8_14.pdf

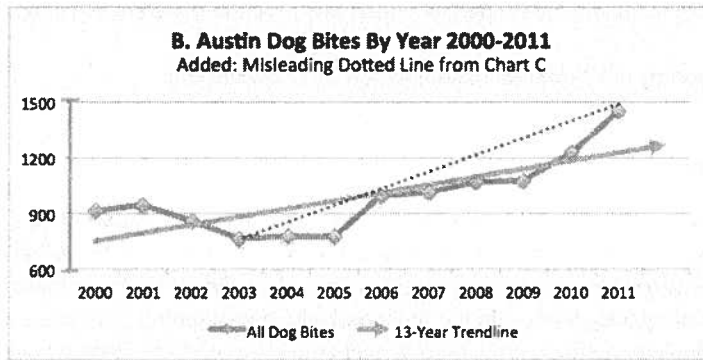
³ "Central Texas Digest: Austin animal shelter director gets new job; Bastrop inmate escapes for 5 minutes," Austin American Statesman, May 13, 2010 (Retrieved Aug. 27, 2010)
<http://www.statesman.com/news/local/central-texas-digest-austin-animal-shelter-director-gets-687682.html>

Charts: Austin Dog Bites by Year 2000-2011

Charts A and B by DogsBite.org. Chart C embedded AAS Figure 1.



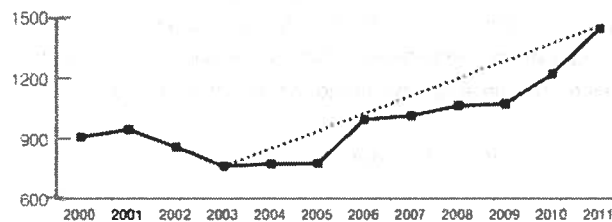
Year	All Dog Bites	Travis Co. Pop.	Incidence Rate
2000	908	812280	111.9
2001	947	830150	114.1
2002	858	844263	101.6
2003	784	858927	98.2
2004	778	874085	88.8
2005	778	893295	87.1
2006	995	920544	108.1
2007	1015	948180	107.0
2008	1065	978876	108.8
2009	1074	1008345	106.5
2010	1222	1024266	119.3
2011	1449	1049873	138.0
Average			104.7



C. Austin Animal Services Bite Reports Graph
Misleading Dotted Line

Figure 1. Bite reports 2000 - 2011

1a. Bite Reports Graph



Dog Bite Incidence Rate

The way to measure injury and disease occurrences within a population is to calculate the incidence rate per 100,000 of the population, not to measure the occurrences based upon the whole population as AAS does on page 2 of their report (Figure 2c).⁴ The average incidence rate of dog bites in Travis County over the 12-year period (2000-2011) is 106.7. The average incidence rate for the years depicted by the misleading dotted line (2003-2011) is even lower at 105.9.

In 2011, the incidence rate in Travis County shot up to 138.

Coming out of 2009, the incidence rate was 106.5, just below the 12-year average of 106.7. By the end of 2011, the incidence rate in Travis County had amplified to 138, a 30% rise. No 3-year period in the 12-year data set shows a similar sized percent increase in the incidence rate. The linear trendline on the DogsBite.org chart shows the incidence rate is growing, but not as fast as overall dog bites and certainly not as fast as the misleading dotted line used by AAS (Figure 1).

What Happened in 2006?

In both charts depicting the rise in dog bites and incidence rate, there is a spike in 2006. From 2004 to 2006 there is a 28% increase in dog bites and an incidence rate rise from 88.8 to 108.1. Both charts also show the decreasing trend from 2001 to 2005 -- at odds to population growth -- that occurs before this spike. The surge in 2006 might represent a "correction" or the sudden absorption of 11,500+ evacuees from hurricanes Katrina and Rita starting in the fall of 2005.⁵

What is important about the 2006 spike is that it leveled off after that year. The following years, 2007 to 2009, show a modest rise in comparison and mirror the linear trendline. After the jump in 2010, there was no leveling off, the incline even steepened in 2011. A degree of volatility is expected in dog bite reports annually, but steep inclines such as what occurred between 2004-2006 and 2009-2011 deserve a closer look and can reflect large-scale events and policy changes.

Please view related charts D, E and F on the following page.

⁴Along with minimizing dog bite reports to "salival contact" reports, the AAS correlative graph Figure 2c -- not based on incidence rate -- is used to further minimize dog bite occurrences within a population.

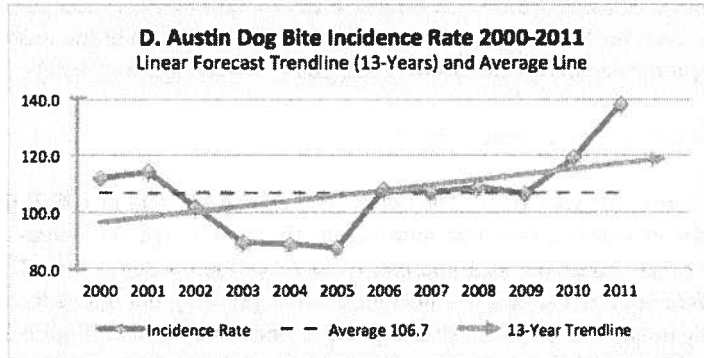
http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Demographics/austin_forecast_2012_annual_pub.pdf

⁵Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst human disasters in U.S. history. Texas took in the most evacuees. In April 2006, the Austin area was hosting 11,529 Katrina and Rita evacuees, the 4th highest in the state. The immediate and long-term aftermath of Katrina significantly taxed the capacities of cities that provided large-scale assistance.

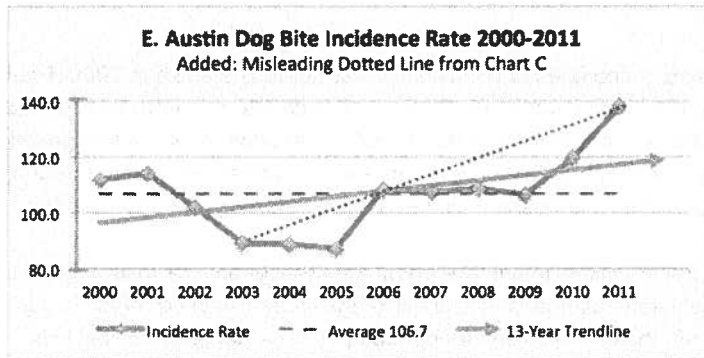
http://www.utexas.edu/research/cswr/katrina/Documents/City_of_Aus_Final_Report.pdf

Charts: Austin Dog Bite Incidence Rate 2000-2011

Charts D and E by DogsBite.org. Chart F embedded AAS Figure 2c.



Year	All Dog Bites	Travis Co. Pop.	Incidence Rate
2000	809	812280	111.8
2001	947	830150	114.1
2002	858	844283	101.6
2003	764	858827	89.2
2004	778	874065	88.8
2005	778	893285	87.1
2006	995	920544	108.1
2007	1015	948160	107.0
2008	1065	978976	108.6
2009	1074	1008345	106.5
2010	1222	1024288	119.3
2011	1449	1048873	138.0
Average			106.7



2004-2006 Increases			
% Bites	28%	% Incidence	22%
		Avg. Incidence	94.7

2005-2007 Increases			
% Bites	30%	% Incidence	23%
		Avg. Incidence	100.7

2009-2011 Increases			
% Bites	35%	% Incidence	30%
		Avg. Incidence	121.3

2003-2011 Avg. Incidence	
	105.9

F. Austin Animal Services Correlative Graph
Misleading Correlative Graph and Misleading Dotted Line

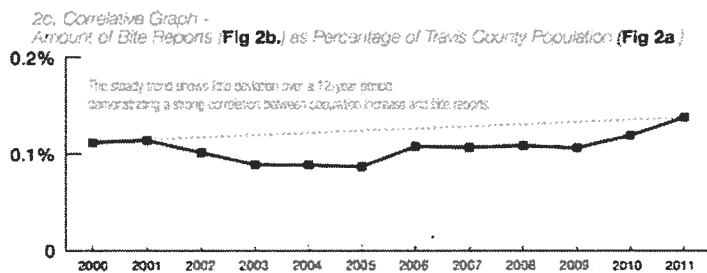
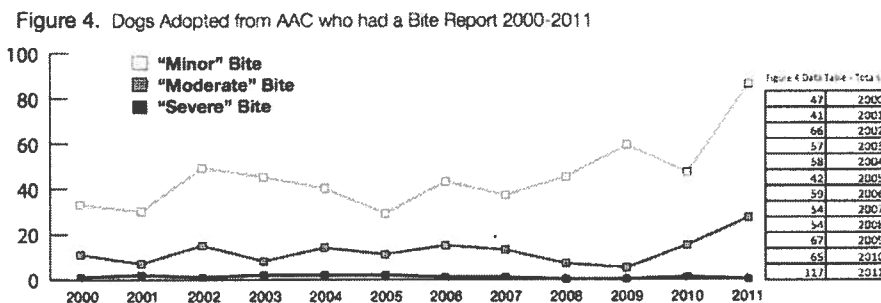
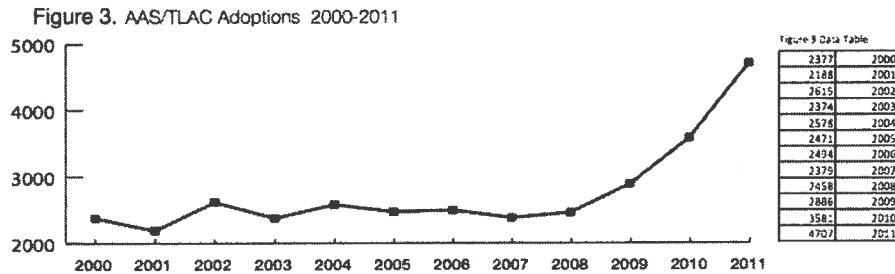


Figure 4 Lacks Information

Figure 3 on the AAS report shows combined adoptions from AAS and TLAC. Figure 4, Dogs Adopted from Austin Animal Center (AAC) who had a Bite Report 2000-2011, does not indicate such combined results. The largest Austin No-Kill group, Austin Pets Alive!, who also operates out of the TLAC facility, is required under contract to take in 3,000 animals annually from AAC's "at-risk" list (biters, behavior problem dogs).⁶ Presumably about 2,000 of these animals are dogs.

- It is unclear if the highest risk of biting dogs transferred to and adopted out by APA! from TLAC is included in Figure 4.
- In 2010, when No-Kill went into effect, APA! took in 67% more animals from AAC: 2,974, up from 1,783 in 2009. 2011 shows 2,774 animals.⁷
- According to the AAC website, about 20% of all dog intakes become *transfers* with the majority (50-60%) going to APA! This still leaves about 40% of those *transfers* potentially unaccounted for in Figure 4.⁸
- One of the haziest areas of No-Kill lies in the *transfer* of high risk biting dogs to rescue groups prior to "actual" adoption. Notably, the AAC website lists *transfers* and *adoptions* as separate categories.

Charts: Figures 3 and 4 from AAS Report



⁶ Josh Rosenblatt, "Budget Outlook Grim for Animal Center," The Austin Chronicle, August 10, 2012 (Retrieved Aug 29, 2012)

<http://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2012-08-10/budget-outlook-grim-for-animal-center/>

⁷ Austin's Progress, austinpetsalive.org (Retrieved Sept. 1, 2012)

<http://www.austinpetsalive.org/about/austin-progress/>

⁸ Operation Reports - Austin Animal Center, ci.austin.tx.us (Retrieved Aug. 30, 2012)

http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/health/pets/downloads/moratorium_combined-102011-11042011-ver1.pdf

Jan. 2011 - Sep. 2011 Outcomes (Retrieved Aug. 30, 2012)

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/health/pets/reports.htm> - ops