

February 5, 2025

Via email

Councilmembers
City Council
Anaheim, California

Ashleigh Aitken
Mayor
Anaheim, California

James Vanderpool
City Manager
Anaheim, California

Robert Fabela
City Attorney
Anaheim, California

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
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Dear Councilmembers, Mayor Aitken, Mr. Vanderpool, and Mr. Fabela:

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Inc. (PETA) to once again urge you to cease all coyote trapping in Anaheim. The City has allowed a violent felon who has committed state trapping crimes to trap and then kill coyotes in his gas chamber truck, potentially only a few hundred feet from residents' and their families' homes without their consent as required by California law. Yet Anaheim apparently provides no oversight of its contracted trapper and does not monitor his activities or even require him to document where he places traps throughout the City.

A whistleblower recently contacted PETA to express serious safety concerns about cities' decisions to contract with Anaheim's trapper Jimmie Rizzo,¹ in part due to their personal knowledge of his violent criminal history. PETA was able to confirm through publicly accessible court records that Rizzo was convicted of the felonies of assault with a semiautomatic weapon and exhibiting a loaded firearm at a daycare center in Orange County, less than three years before Anaheim contracted him.² Records also indicate that, only a few months *after* the contract, Rizzo was sentenced to 90 days in jail for violating his formal probation.³ An extensive review of public records shows no indication that the City conducted a background check or inquired into Rizzo's history, even though he was sentenced to jail time while the City paid him with taxpayer money to provide trapping services during that time.

¹ Beginning September 1, 2019, the City of Anaheim has entered into annual contracts with Coyote, Wildlife and Pest Solutions (CWPS) to provide coyote abatement services. *See* Master Purchase Agreement #106-493101, available [here](#). Jimmie Rizzo is the sole trapper for CWPS.

² The two felony convictions are publicly available via the Superior Court of California, County of Orange's online Case Access, available at: <https://www.occourts.org/online-services/case-access> (Case No. 15WF2229). On February 24, 2017, Rizzo pled guilty to assaulting another person with a semiautomatic firearm under Cal. Penal Code § 245(b) and exhibiting a loaded firearm at a day care center under Cal Penal Code § 417(b) (requires that a person draw or exhibit a loaded firearm in a "rude, angry, or threatening manner" or in a "fight or quarrel.").

³ *Id.* Rizzo's formal probation was revoked on December 4, 2019, and he subsequently received a 90-day jail sentence.

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Moreover, the City of Anaheim is aware that Rizzo, as he self-reported to the City of Torrance, has placed traps in locations which are less than 150 yards from numerous homes without residents' written consent, in violation of 14 C.C.R. section 465.5(g)(3).⁴ The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) concluded the same after its 2024 investigation into Rizzo's trapping in Torrance⁵ and submitted a formal complaint which led the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office to take action on Rizzo's criminal case.⁶ Given that Rizzo continued to brazenly commit state trapping laws for years in a nearby city, there is a strong possibility that he does the same in Anaheim where he faces no consequences from the City. An extensive review of public records, and as confirmed by Mayor Aitken, demonstrates that Anaheim provides virtually no oversight of Rizzo, does not monitor his day-to-day activities or require him to keep related records, and has no idea where Rizzo places traps in the city. There is no indication that the City collects any meaningful data that would be relevant to a trapping program, such as coyote population numbers or locations where coyotes are found/trapped.

According to public records produced by the City, Rizzo has trapped and killed 67 coyotes in Anaheim since his contract with the City began.⁷ If the coyotes caught in Rizzo's snares do not slowly die from strangulation in his snare traps, Rizzo then kills the animals on-site⁸ by throwing them in a gas chamber in his truck⁹ where they suffer a slow, painful, and panicked death for potentially upwards of 30 minutes.¹⁰ Animals often try in desperation to claw themselves out of the gas chamber, sometimes ripping their own claws out.¹¹ According to Rizzo's records in Torrance, some these horrific activities may have taken place less than a few hundred feet from unaware residents and their families.¹² Anaheim's total disregard for ensuring Rizzo complies with the law, intentional lack of knowledge of his activities, and funding extreme cruelty potentially taking place near people's homes without their knowledge or legally-required consent is inexcusable.

⁴ 14 C.C.R. § 465.5(g)(3) provides, "[Snare] [t]raps may not be set within 150 yards of any structure used as a permanent or temporary residence, unless such traps are set by a person controlling such property or by a person who has and is carrying with him written consent of the landowner to so place the trap or traps." A violation of this provision is a misdemeanor. *Id.* § T. 14, D.1.

⁵ After PETA's February 14, 2024, complaint to CDFW, the agency filed a formal complaint concerning Rizzo's state trapping crime violations with the Torrance City Attorney's Office on April 3, 2024, which was transferred to the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office. See Lila Seidman, *Torrance coyote trapper investigated for possible violation of state law*, Los Angeles Times (May 17, 2024), <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2024-05-17/coyote-trapper-torrance>. On December 4, 2024, CDFW confirmed to PETA during a phone conversation that the agency found multiple violations.

⁶ In a November 21, 2024, email, the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office told PETA that "Rizzo's case has been processed by our Office and is making its way through the legal channels that we determined would be the most effective in educating and preventing criminal conduct as it relates to the trapping of the coyotes." While not entirely clear, this may refer to a misdemeanor diversion program which generally require court-approved conditions.

⁷ Anaheim's trapping data produced on January 30, 2025 (available [here](#)) shows that a total of 84 coyotes have been trapped and killed by the City, 67 of which have occurred during Rizzo's contract.

⁸ 14 C.C.R. § 465.5(g)(1) states, "All furbearing and nongame mammals [including coyotes] that are legal to trap must be immediately killed or released."

⁹ Rizzo openly admits he uses a mobile gas chamber in his truck to kill trapped coyotes. See e.g., [PETA's Petition for Regulation Change to the California Fish and Game Commission](#), Exhibit 5 (Apr. 1, 2024) (Statement of Anaheim resident Matthew Duncan).

¹⁰ See Presentation of Dr. Debra Hickman (DVM, MS, DACLAM, DACAW), Director of the Laboratory Animal Resource Center at Indiana University, 2014 AVMA Humane Endings Symposium; Annelise Hanshaw, *Missouri lawmaker works with Humane Society to stop use of gas to kill shelter animals*, Missouri Independent (Jan. 20, 2023); HSUS Statement on Gas Chambers, Humane Society of the United States, <https://humanepro.org/page/hsusstatement-gas-chambers>.

¹¹ See Hanshaw, *supra* note 10.

¹² See PETA's Complaint to CDFW (Feb. 14, 2024), https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/From-PETA-Request-CDFW-Investigate-Jimmie-Rizzo_redacted.pdf.

Furthermore, the City of Anaheim's continued indiscriminate killing of coyotes is a cruel attack on California wildlife at a time when it needs the most support. The Los Angeles area fire that have taken human lives and destroyed homes have also burned through thousands of acres of wildlife habitat.¹³ If the animals have not already died from the flames, loss of critical habitats and food sources, or respiratory issues from smoke inhalation,¹⁴ they may be forced into surrounding neighborhoods and other urban areas that have already intruded on these historic native habitats.¹⁵ Many are burned or injured, making it difficult or impossible for them to flee and find food or water.¹⁶ In addition, these wildfires severely threaten local ecosystems with likely long-term consequences, potentially disrupting entire ecological communities.¹⁷ Because the fires have spread to so many human structures, even the most resilient species that are able to cohabitate in urban areas with humans are losing their shelter and resources.¹⁸ In addition, the City is fully aware that all credible scientific studies have determined that indiscriminately killing coyotes has no result on coyote populations and may even be counterproductive.¹⁹ Predictably, in the years that Anaheim has had a trapping program, it has not once produced any data that the program has had any effect or increased public safety. The only reasonable path forward is for the City to end all trapping.

PETA urges the City of Anaheim to end its coyote trapping program and instead support distressed native California wildlife instead of ruthlessly killing them in their own habitats or the areas they are forced into to survive. The City has no excuse to continue to blindly fund Rizzo, who violated his probation for violent felonies and was sentenced to jail time *while* supposedly providing services to the Anaheim and being paid with public funds. Nor can Anaheim justify contracting with a trapper who has committed state trapping crimes and apparently killed coyotes in his gas chamber only a few hundred feet from unaware people's homes and families who were given a the legally-required opportunity to refuse to consent to these activities.

Respectfully,



Mary Maerz
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¹³ Jill Replogle, *You might see injured wild animals in fire areas. Here's what to do.*, LAist (Jan. 15, 2025), <https://laist.com/news/climate-environment/la-fires-injured-wild-animals-what-to-do>.

¹⁴ Mio Senzaki and Laura Deehan, *Wildlifes in Los Angeles: Impacts on wildlife and ocean ecosystems*, Environment America (Jan. 23, 2025), <https://environmentamerica.org/california/articles/wildfires-in-los-angeles-impacts-on-wildlife-and-ocean-ecosystems/>.

¹⁵ Replogle, *supra* note 13. See also Phoebe Weston, *Fleeing mountain lions and scorched earth: can wildlife survive California's wildfires?* (Jan. 16, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/16/fleeing-mountain-lions-scorched-earth-can-wildlife-survive-california-wildfires-aoe>.

¹⁶ Weston, *supra* note 15.

¹⁷ Senzaki and Deehan, *supra* note 14.

¹⁸ Kylie Mohr, *What do the deadly Los Angeles fires mean for the city's wildlife?* (Jan. 10, 2025), <https://www.hcn.org/articles/what-do-the-deadly-los-angeles-fires-mean-for-the-citys-wildlife/> (interviewing wildlife biologist Miguel Ordeñana).

¹⁹ For a summary of the available science concerning lethal removal of coyotes, see PETA's Petition for Regulation Change to the California Fish and Game Commission, *supra* note 9, at 4-10.