

February 5, 2025

Via email

Councilmembers
City Council
Rancho Palos Verdes, California
[REDACTED]

David L. Bradley
Mayor
Rancho Palos Verdes, California
[REDACTED]

Ara Mihranian
City Manager
Rancho Palos Verdes, California
[REDACTED]

Elena Gerli
City Attorney
Rancho Palos Verdes, California
[REDACTED]

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS
FOUNDATION

Washington
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Dear Councilmembers, Mayor Bradley, Mr. Mihranian, and Ms. Gerli:

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 Rancho Palos Verdes (“RPV”). 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 RPV 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. RPV also apparently has no data on the number of coyotes Rizzo has trapped and killed, calling into question whether the City’s trapping program has any goal or purpose other than cruelly and senselessly killing wildlife.

A whistleblower recently contacted PETA to express serious safety concerns about cities’ decisions to contract with RPV’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 five years before RPV contracted him.² Records also indicate that, less than two years before 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.

¹ Beginning September 21, 2021, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes has entered into annual contracts with Coyote, Wildlife and Pest Solutions (CWPS) to provide coyote abatement services. See Amendment No. 1 to Agreement for Professional Services, 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 Rizzo’s formal probation was revoked on December 4, 2019, and he subsequently received a 90-day jail sentence.

PETA FOUNDATION IS AN OPERATING
NAME OF THE FOUNDATION TO
SUPPORT ANIMAL PROTECTION.

ENTITIES:

- PETA U.S.
- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

Moreover, RPV is or should be 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 RPV where he faces no consequences from the City.

An extensive review of public record indicates that the City provides virtually no oversight of Rizzo, does not monitor his day-to-day activities or require him to keep related records, and apparently has no idea where Rizzo places traps in the city.⁷ RPV also apparently keeps no data as to the number of coyotes Rizzo traps and kills, though data from Torrance and Anaheim suggests that he has killed approximately 140 coyotes or more⁸ in those cities alone. RPV's apparent complete lack of knowledge or interest in the activities of its contracted trapper would suggest that the City's trapping has no goal or purpose other than, perhaps, to emptily appease anecdotal complaints from residents. But the City continues to pay a trapper who has broken state trapping law and has a violent criminal history to kill wildlife in the city—likely in close proximity to residents' homes—with no restrictions or monitoring.

If the coyotes caught in Rizzo's snares do not slowly die from strangulation in his snare traps, Rizzo then kills the animals on-site⁹ by throwing them in a gas chamber in his truck¹⁰ where they suffer a slow,

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 PETA submitted a public records request to RPV on January 24, 2024, broadly seeking records related to Rizzo's contract, trapping data, Rizzo's killing methods, and more. The City produced no records that contained trapping data of any kind or any records of Rizzo's trap location and other activities.

⁸ According to Anaheim data, Rizzo has trapped and killed 67 coyotes since 2019. Torrance released coyote trapping data on September 23, 2023, which shows that Rizzo trapped and killed 54 coyotes in his first two years of trapping in the city (31 in 2021-2022 and 23 for 11 months of the 2022-2023 cycle). Item 8D Supplemental #1 at 3, Torrance City Council Meeting (Sep. 23, 2023), https://torrance.granicus.com/Viewer.php?view_id=8&clip_id=14145&meta_id=363752. Using a conservative estimate of the number coyotes trapped and killed since August 31, 2023, based on the available data, the number of coyotes Rizzo has killed in Torrance is likely 80 or upwards since 2021.

⁹ 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.”

¹⁰ 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 Matthew Duncan).

painful, and panicked death for potentially upwards of 30 minutes.¹¹ Animals often try in desperation to claw themselves out of the gas chamber, sometimes ripping their own claws out.¹² 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.¹³ RPV'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.

Furthermore, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes' continued indiscriminate killing of coyotes—apparently with no goal or purpose—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.¹⁴ If the animals have not already died from the flames, loss of critical habitats and food sources, or respiratory issues from smoke inhalation,¹⁵ they may be forced into surrounding neighborhoods and other urban areas that have already intruded on these historic native habitats.¹⁶ Many are burned or injured, making it difficult or impossible for them to flee and find food or water.¹⁷ In addition, these wildfires severely threaten local ecosystems with likely long-term consequences, potentially disrupting entire ecological communities.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

In addition, the City is aware that all credible scientific studies have determined that indiscriminately killing coyotes has no result on coyote populations and may even be counterproductive.²⁰ The City's website misleadingly still promotes its 2018 Coyote Management Plan, which was updated prior to the RPV's decision to contract with a trapper and states plainly:

The City has entered into a contract with the County of Los Angeles to provide trapping services in the City only when it has been determined by the City that an “aggressive” coyote exists. *As it is well known that trapping and the resulting euthanization of a coyote is not as effective as other methods of hazing contact with coyotes as discussed*

¹¹ 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>.

¹² See Hanshaw, *supra* note 11.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Jill Replegle, *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>.

¹⁵ 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/>.

¹⁶ Replegle, *supra* note 14. 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>.

¹⁷ Weston, *supra* note 16.

¹⁸ Senzaki and Deehan, *supra* note 15.

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ 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 10, at 4-10.

within this Management Plan, the City shall be the one to determine, based on field observations and assessing the incident, if a case needs to be brought to the County’s attention or simply additional education instruction is needed.²¹

As noted, in the years that RPV has had a trapping program, it has not once produced any public data that the program has had any effect or increased public safety. In contracting with Rizzo, the City has also eliminated any requirement that only “aggressive” coyotes should be targeted—instead, coyotes are killed indiscriminately with no records kept.

PETA urges the City of Rancho Palos Verdes 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 a violent felon—who is not monitored or required to document his activities—who has illegally placed traps and apparently killed coyotes in his gas chamber only a few hundred feet from unaware people’s homes and families who were never given their legally-required opportunity to refuse to consent to these horrendous activities. The only reasonable path forward is for the City to end all trapping.

Respectfully,



Mary Maerz
Senior Counsel, PETA Foundation

²¹ Coyote Management Plan, City of Rancho Palos Verdes, https://www.rpvca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/12546/Revised-coyote-management-plan-AM-9-25-18-edits_2 (emphasis added).