

February 5, 2025

Via email

Councilmembers  
City Council  
Torrance, California  
[REDACTED]

George Chen  
Mayor  
Torrance, California  
[REDACTED]

Aram Chaparyan  
City Manager  
Torrance, California  
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Patrick Sullivan  
City Attorney  
Torrance, California  
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PEOPLE FOR  
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TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS  
FOUNDATION

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Dear Councilmembers, Mayor Chen, Mr. Chaparyan, and Mr. Sullivan:

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 Torrance. The City has been complicit in, and apparently advised, the commission California trapping crimes, allowing a violent felon to illegally trap and then kill coyotes in his gas chamber truck only a few hundred feet from Torrance residents' and their families' homes without their knowledge or consent as required by law.

A whistleblower recently contacted PETA to express serious safety concerns about cities' decisions to contract with Torrance's trapper Jimmie Rizzo,<sup>1</sup> 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, less than five years before Torrance contracted him.<sup>2</sup> Records also indicate that, less than two years before the contract, Rizzo was sentenced to 90 days in jail for violating his formal probation.<sup>3</sup> An extensive review of public records shows no indication that the City conducted a background check or

<sup>1</sup> Beginning November 9, 2021, City of Torrance has entered into annual contracts with Coyote, Wildlife and Pest Solutions (CWPS) to provide coyote abatement services. Jimmie Rizzo is the sole trapper for CWPS and is the company's Chief Financial Officer. *See* Item 9D Staff Report at 2-4 and 102-105, Torrance City Council Meeting (Nov. 9, 2021), [https://torrance.granicus.com/Viewer.php?view\\_id=8&clip\\_id=13825&meta\\_id=335131](https://torrance.granicus.com/Viewer.php?view_id=8&clip_id=13825&meta_id=335131).

<sup>2</sup> 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.").

<sup>3</sup> 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.)

inquired into Rizzo's history, but instead, Torrance accepted his company's bid because it was the only one submitted.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the City of Torrance has been aware for years that Rizzo places 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).<sup>5</sup> The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) concluded the same after its 2024 investigation into Rizzo's trapping<sup>6</sup> and submitted a formal complaint which led the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office to take action on Rizzo's criminal case.<sup>7</sup>

Based on Torrance's available data, Rizzo has likely trapped and killed at least 80 coyotes in the city.<sup>8</sup> If the coyotes caught in Rizzo's snares do not slowly die from strangulation in his snare traps, Rizzo then kills the animals, likely on-site,<sup>9</sup> by throwing them in a gas chamber in his truck<sup>10</sup> where they suffer a slow, painful, and panicked death for potentially upwards of 30 minutes.<sup>11</sup> Animals often try in desperation to claw themselves out of the gas chamber, sometimes ripping their own claws out.<sup>12</sup> According to Rizzo's records, some these horrific activities may have taken place less than a few hundred feet from unaware residents and their families.<sup>13</sup> The City's disregard for the law

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<sup>4</sup> See Item 9D Staff Report *supra* note 1 at 2-4.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=8&clip\\_id=14145&meta\\_id=363752](https://torrance.granicus.com/MetaViewer.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.

<sup>9</sup> 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."

<sup>10</sup> 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).

<sup>11</sup> 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>.

<sup>12</sup> See Hanshaw, *supra* note 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ocean Sump is located between Merrill Street, Ocean Avenue, Cathann Street, and Grant Avenue in Torrance's Southwood neighborhood. See e.g., Sump Fencing Restoration Project Location Map, City of Torrance, <https://www.torranceca.gov/our-city/public-works/civil-and-traffic-engineering/capital-improvement-projects/sump-fencing-restoration-project>. Rizzo referred to Ocean Sump as "Merril Street Basin" in trapping records prepared for

and its choice to continue funding extreme cruelty taking place near people’s homes without their knowledge or legally-required consent is appalling. This is particularly true in light of records indicating that the City of Torrance plays a more active role in Rizzo’s trapping crimes.

As early as 2021, the City appears to have advised its trappers to place traps in areas within 150 yards of residents’ homes and no records have shown any discussion of or attempt to acquire residents’ written permission as required by section 465.5(g)(3). As an independent contractor, Rizzo’s placement of traps is based on the City’s coyote data and its goals, meaning that Rizzo places traps at the City’s guidance. In City Council documents from November 9, 2021—the same meeting in which the City first entered into an agreement with Rizzo—Community Services Department staff, concurred by Mr. Chaparyan, stated to then-Mayor Pat Furney that “[t]he trapping program locations include...Ocean Sump, Madrona Marsh Sump, and Bishop Sump,”<sup>14</sup> which are locations Rizzo continued to place traps for years, as he reported to the City.<sup>15</sup> The majorities of Madrona Marsh Sump and Bishop Sump are within 150-yards of residents’ homes, and—as documented in PETA’s 2024 complaint to CDFW—*any* trap placement in Ocean Sump without the consent of residents violates section 465.5(g)(3).<sup>16</sup> City staff’s identification of these trapping locations came immediately after advising Furney on section 465.5(g)(3), removing any doubt that the City knew or should have known that it was facilitating state trapping crimes. Based on the available evidence, the City of Torrance is potentially criminally liable under Cal. Penal Code sections 31 and 659 for “advis[ing] and encourag[ing]”<sup>17</sup> and “counseling or aiding”<sup>18</sup> the commission of state trapping crimes, respectively.

Furthermore, the City’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.<sup>19</sup> If the animals have not already died from the flames, loss of critical habitats and food sources, or respiratory issues from smoke inhalation,<sup>20</sup> they may be forced into surrounding neighborhoods and other urban areas that have already intruded on these historic native habitats.<sup>21</sup> Many are burned or injured, making it difficult or impossible for them to flee and find food or water.<sup>22</sup> In addition, these

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the City. 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](https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/From-PETA-Request-CDFW-Investigate-Jimmie-Rizzo_redacted.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Item 9D Supplemental #1, Torrance City Council Meeting (Nov. 9, 2021),

[https://torrance.granicus.com/Viewer.php?view\\_id=8&clip\\_id=13825&meta\\_id=335132](https://torrance.granicus.com/Viewer.php?view_id=8&clip_id=13825&meta_id=335132).

<sup>15</sup> See PETA’s Complaint to CDFW, *supra* note 13.

<sup>16</sup> See *e.g.*, *id.* (Exhibit 5, referring to Ocean Sump as Merrill Street Basin).

<sup>17</sup> Cal. Penal Code § 31 states, “All persons concerned in the commission of a crime, whether it be felony or misdemeanor, and whether they directly commit the act constituting the offense, or aid and abet in its commission, or, not being present, have advised and encouraged its commission...are principals in any crime so committed.”

<sup>18</sup> Cal. Penal Code § 659 states, “Whenever an act is declared a misdemeanor, and no punishment for counseling or aiding in the commission of such act is expressly prescribed by law, every person who counsels or aids another in the commission of such act is guilty of a misdemeanor.”

<sup>19</sup> 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>.

<sup>20</sup> Mio Senzaki and Laura Deehan, *Wildlives 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/>.

<sup>21</sup> Replogle, *supra* note 19. 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>.

<sup>22</sup> Weston, *supra* note 21.

wildfires severely threaten local ecosystems with likely long-term consequences, potentially disrupting entire ecological communities.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> Predictably, in the years that Torrance 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 Torrance 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 fund a violent felon 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.

Respectfully,



Mary Maerz  
Senior Counsel, PETA Foundation

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<sup>23</sup> Senzaki and Deehan, *supra* note 20.

<sup>24</sup> 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).

<sup>25</sup> 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.