

Good evening, Commissioners.

My name is Susan Whatley Prainito.

I'm here because, over the past year, Lee County has experienced multiple large-scale animal hoarding cases that required responses from law enforcement, Animal Control, shelters, rescues, veterinarians, the courts, and volunteers.

Those cases led me to ask a simple question:

Are we investing enough effort in preventing these situations, or are we primarily responding after they've already become crises?

For nearly forty years I've adopted rescue dogs, most of them seniors. About eight months ago, I adopted a nine-year-old breeding dog named Jezebell. She came from a commercial breeding operation in another Alabama county, where she was extensively confined and spent her life producing puppies for revenue before entering the rescue system.

Today, she's learning how to simply be a dog.

9 years of fear doesn't disappear overnight

Jezebell's journey didn't end when she entered the rescue system—it simply became someone else's responsibility. Watching her recovery made me wonder: what can we do to reduce the number of large-scale animal welfare failures that ultimately become someone else's responsibility?

So I spoke with experienced rescuers, reviewed available information, and tried to understand the process before forming conclusions.

What I found wasn't a lack of compassion.

The people I spoke with care deeply.

The challenge wasn't commitment. It was that no one owns the entire process from beginning to end.

Everyone owns a piece of it, but no one owns the whole.

As someone who spent decades managing complex operations, I've learned that when good people keep encountering the same recurring problem, the first question isn't, "Who's at fault?"

It's, "What can the system teach us?"

Tonight, I'm respectfully asking this Commission to establish an ad hoc Animal Welfare Committee.

Bring together Animal Control, law enforcement, Auburn's veterinary community, shelters, rescue organizations, veterinarians, and citizens. Ask them to determine why these large-scale animal welfare failures continue to occur, where opportunities for prevention exist, and what meaningful recommendations this Commission can consider to reduce their frequency and impact.

I ask that the committee also evaluate common intake and transfer reporting standards so we can better understand how animals move through our local system.

Because we cannot improve what we do not measure.

And we cannot prevent what we do not understand.

I believe we have the ability, right here in Lee County, to develop meaningful laws and policies that improve companion animal welfare—not just respond to the next crisis.

Lee County is home to one of the premier veterinary schools in the nation. We have exceptional expertise, dedicated professionals, committed rescue organizations, and citizens who care deeply.

What we need is a process that brings those pieces together.

I'm not asking you to solve every problem tonight.

I'm asking you to take the first step.

Create the committee. Bring the stakeholders together. Let them do what they do best.

Thank you for your time.