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Audit Faults Animal Services

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Saying that the city's Animal Services Department is "stuck in a time warp," City Controller [Laura Chick](#) charged Wednesday that the department could be losing nearly \$11 million a year by not enforcing penalties against people who fail to license their animals.

Chick, who has been an outspoken critic of Mayor James K. Hahn, said the mayor should have ensured that the department, which has an annual budget of about \$14.5 million, made other improvements she recommended two years ago. Those included reaching out to pet owners and veterinarians to get more dogs licensed.

"Where's the leadership? Where's the accountability?" Chick asked. "I am contacting the mayor to say 'not good enough.'"

Officials in Hahn's office and in the Animal Services Department responded testily to the controller's sharp language.

"The mayor's priority is to combat violent crime on our streets, not hire more animal control officers to go door to door to pass out tickets," said Deputy Mayor Doane Liu.

In recent months, the city's Animal Services Department has been besieged by animal rights activists who have accused officials of needlessly killing tens of thousands of animals in city shelters. Liu said officials are working hard to improve the department, hire a new general manager, and increase adoptions and the spaying and neutering of animals.

"It's awfully convenient for an audit to say they are stuck in a time warp," Liu said. "But it sure doesn't give us any money."

Jackie David, spokeswoman for the department, said that many of Chick's suggestions were unrealistic and that the department had responded to others but the controller had "refused to acknowledge our response."

Chick's assertion that the department could bring in \$10.7 million a year by enforcing penalties for failure to license animals, for example, is "just plain unrealistic," David said.

Many residents who failed to relicense their pets did so because their pets died or moved out of the city, David said. What's more, David said, if residents don't have \$10 to pay for a license, how can they be expected to pay a \$500 fine?

"We are busy responding to real public safety concerns, such as a dangerous animal," she said. "And so we don't have the staff to pull us out of the so-called dark ages."

Chick said the department was using a staffing shortage as "an excuse for not even trying to improve."

She said pet licensing was part of a broad, long-range plan adopted by the mayor and City Council to "control an out-of-control population" of dogs and cats on the streets.

Some animal rights activists, who have criticized the department for months, agreed that the department must do more.

But Pam Ferdin, co-founder of the Los Angeles chapter of the Animal Defense League, said she was not convinced that licensing animals should be the department's top priority.

"They are just totally missing the point," Ferdin said, adding that officials should concentrate on finding homes for animals instead of euthanizing them.

For more than a year, Ferdin and other activists have been campaigning against the Animal Services Department. Until former General Manager Jerry Greenwalt retired in March, they had directed their rage at him, showering his neighborhood with leaflets that described him as a killer.