

OPEN MIC

Involve experts in Dade's shelter crisis

The long-running crisis at Miami-Dade County's Animal Services Department demands we chart a new course. In the gut-wrenching and complicated world of this animal shelter, this is our moment to craft a better future together.

The shelter is housing nearly double the number of animals a county-funded audit reported could be considered safe. Citizens have nowhere to take lost or abandoned animals. The agency's director is under suspension, facing multiple complaints that name her own senior staff as witnesses. Hard-working staff is overwhelmed, demoralized and wondering when new leadership will arrive.

As a board member of the national Humane Society of the United States and co-founder of the nonprofit Friends of Miami Animals Foundation, I care deeply about the suffering of animals, shelter staff and volunteers, as do many others.

Last year, I urged the county to fund an independent audit of conditions at the shelter. The county hired a top animal services consultant. In March, the expert presented a list of dire recommendations. None have been implemented.

The department needs independent expert advice, oversight by stakeholders and residents, increased funding and full accountability. The mayor and commissioners should immediately appoint a top-tier group of experts, community leaders and animal advocates who can

work independently and make recommendations to establish an animal-welfare system. This kind of input has helped our county tackle complicated issues such as homelessness.

We ask our elected officials to establish a study commission so our shelter receives the guidance, support and accountability it clearly needs.

— Yolanda Berkowitz, Miami

Editor's note: The writer has filed a lawsuit against the suspended director of Animal Services.