

# Ousted Miami-Dade animal shelter director counter sues over ‘campaign of harassment’

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In a counter suit defending her tenure running Miami-Dade’s pet shelter, Bronwyn Stanford claims she lost her job after she stood up to a wealthy benefactor who wanted a say in how the county agency was run.

Mayor Daniella Levine Cava appointed the lawyer and former child-

welfare administrator as Animal Services director in late 2021, placing Stanford in charge of the county’s Doral shelter during an ongoing surge of homeless dogs. Stanford, who started a cat-rescue organization in Tampa, soon was at odds with one of the shelter’s most active volunteers.

Yolanda Berkowitz is a founder of the Friends of Miami Animals Foundation, a charity that backed



Bronwyn  
Stanford

sterilization efforts in Miami-Dade and funded plane rides for shelter dogs to rescue groups as far away as Canada.

Berkowitz sued Stanford for slander in June, claiming the director falsely told shelter staff Berkowitz had been an escort

in her younger days before marrying her husband of more than 20 years, Miami developer Jeff Berkowitz. Days after the suit became public, Levine Cava placed Stanford on paid administrative leave without explanation.

In her Sept. 18 counter claim to the slander suit, Stanford alleges she ran afoul of Berkowitz’s de-

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mands from the get-go after agreeing to an informal interview with her while Levine Cava was deciding who to pick for the Animal Services job. Stanford said Berkowitz urged Levine Cava to hire someone else.

Once on the job, Stanford said she clashed with Berkowitz after deciding to reinstate a rescue organization as a county partner, overruling a ban she said Berkowitz had requested after a social-media spat with the non-profit. The suit claims Berkowitz warned Stanford that if the rescue group was reinstated, “things would not go well for her.”

“Faced with a Director

who would not accede to her desire to act as the unelected and unappointed mediator of MDAS [Miami-Dade Animal Services] affairs, Berkowitz and FoMA [Friends of Miami Animals Foundation] embarked on a campaign to destroy Stanford’s reputation and business relationship with Miami-Dade County,” Stanford’s suit reads. A later passage says: “Indeed, when Stanford, a career public servant, dared to challenge her previously untrammelled influence over MDAS, Berkowitz took it upon herself to get Stanford out of the way.”

The countersuit calls the slander suit “frivolous”

and lists Berkowitz and Friends of Miami Animals Foundation as defendants. It claims mental distress from Berkowitz’s actions, and blames collusion with disgruntled Animal Services employees for an August report from the county Inspector General’s Office that faulted Stanford for accepting free X-rays at the shelter for her cat shortly after taking the Miami-Dade job.

On Friday, Berkowitz lawyer Hank Adorno called the counter-claim “absurd.”

“How absurd,” Adorno said in a statement. “You slander someone, and then claim you are the victim.”

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