

BRAD STEPHENSON

CRIMINAL DISTRICT ATTORNEY
91ST JUDICIAL DISTRICT

100 West Main, Suite 204
Eastland, Texas 76448

Telephone 254/629-2659
Facsimile 254/629-3361

To: The Citizens of Stephens County, Texas

As many of you are aware, there are cruelty to animal cases alleged to have occurred at the Breckenridge Animal Shelter between December 20, 2021 and January 4, 2022. If you are indeed aware of this case, such information was most likely deemed from the reporting of this case by the Breckenridge American or the Breckenridge Texan.

I'd like to begin by informing you that I, myself, am an animal lover, having owned dogs, horses and cats over my lifetime. As upsetting as these alleged offenses are for you, they are upsetting to me as well. However, as a prosecutor for the State of Texas, my job is to insure justice be done, and unfortunately, in many misdemeanor cases, massive retribution is rarely included.

Since my appointment in May to the position of County Attorney Pro Tem on this case, I have made several trips to Stephens County, placed countless phone calls and as a result, have received a large amount of input from the community, either in person or in writing. Frankly, as of current, I have spent more time on this case than any misdemeanor case in my career, either as an Assistant Criminal District Attorney or as the Criminal District Attorney. These cases and the facts underlying them are "perfect storms" and destined to be tragedies from the onset.

A few years ago, during a difficult financial crunch, the Breckenridge City Council drastically cut funding for the shelter, approximately 75%. The responsibility for operations was moved from the Fire Department and reassigned, basically forced upon the Breckenridge Police Department. With those budgetary cuts, the staff at the Breckenridge Animal Shelter was reduced from four full time positions to one.

Simply stated, one person is not capable of covering all requirements and duties of this type of operation, a twenty-four hour, seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year (24/7/ 365)! Unfortunately, the Breckenridge Police Department did not have, the adequate policies and procedures in place needed at the Breckenridge Animal Shelter, and eventually the inevitable happened and the animals suffered.

When the issues were discovered and became public knowledge, stories began to be circulated, the Breckenridge Police Department began an investigation to determine whether said stories were valid, what had occurred, and whether or not any criminal activity occurred.

On January 7, 2022, Texas Ranger Bo Brown contacted Chief Cantrell of the Breckenridge Police Department offering his assistance and availability if needed. The Chief respectfully declined the assistance, essentially leaving the Breckenridge Police Department investigating its own entity and one of its employed officers. As a result, public opinion as to the validity of the investigation was seriously undermined. Understanding this and being responsible to evaluate said investigation, I have reviewed the exhaustive reports, pictures and commentaries and hereby state, "the Breckenridge Police Department did a very thorough investigation".

As a result of the investigation, new and effective policies and procedure have been implemented at the shelter. I have personally toured the facility which I find to be immaculate. The city of Breckenridge can be proud of the facility, its administration and the care being afforded to the animals there.

Trying any type of case which has already been previously "tried in the media" creates a hardship for all parties involved. In these particular cases, picking a petit jury had it been necessary, would have been very difficult, virtually impossible to accomplish as almost any potential juror would have been previously so tainted due to the wide spread publicity.

Please be aware that the Defendant in these cases, a twenty-one (21) year old man with absolutely no prior criminal history has plead guilty to the charge of Cruelty to Non-Livestock Animal, a class A misdemeanor which carries a potential penalty of up to one (1) year in county jail and a possible fine not to exceed \$4,000. He has qualified for a pre-trial diversion program and will be on probation for one year while paying restitution to the Stephens County Humane Society.

This program is designed to make an impression upon youthful offenders and ensure justice is done while also allowing for the defendant's future to be free of permanent blemish on his record. If the defendant successfully completes all the terms and conditions of the probation, the cases will be dismissed. If not, the guilty plea has been entered and the court will have the ability to assess the full range of punishment stated above.

There is no doubt that not all will be happy with this resolution. However, given all the circumstances, I believe that this is a resolution of a truly sad set of circumstances insuring justice.

Sincerely,



Brad Stephenson

91st Criminal District Attorney, Eastland County

Pro Tem for Stephens County Attorney's Office under order of appointment dated May 19, 2022 by the 90th Judicial Court of Stephens County, Texas