

March 5, 2016

South Carolina Dept of Labor, Licensing and Regulation
Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners
Rebecca M. Hughes, DVM – Board Chair
110 Centerview Drive
PO Box 11329
Columbia, SC 29211-1329

RE: Dr. Melinda Cherise Gray #2015-44
License #2079

Dear Dr. Hughes,

I am writing this letter in response to the February 11, 2016 letter I received from the Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners regarding the complaint I filed in August 2015 against Dr. Melinda C. Gray, owner of Animal Care Center in Abbeville, SC.

As per the letter, after the investigation was complete the matter was presented to the Investigative Review Committee and the recommendations from the said Committee were forwarded to the Board. The Board ordered the initial complaint be dismissed and stated in the letter "Please be assured that during the investigation your concerns were discussed with the licensee."

To say that I am dismayed and disappointed in your decision would be an understatement.

Lulu, a young adult canine, was under Dr. Gray's care on 06/17/15 and on 06/19/15 she was able to get away from Dr. Gray's daughter while outside. Lulu was 7 days post amputation surgery when she went missing from Dr. Gray's office. Pleas to Dr. Gray's office for help in locating Lulu were largely ignored. I came across the story on social media and it shocked me that a veterinarian who supposedly took the following Oath, "*Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge. I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics. I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.*"

The distress and heartbreak of Lulu's family was palpable in their plea for help. As an animal advocate and as the President/Founder of a 501(c)(3) Animal Welfare organization I could not, in good conscience, not offer assistance. Even though I am in Pennsylvania I immediately contacted Lulu's owner, Renee Davis, and offered assistance. A Facebook page was created and in less than three weeks we had over 3,000 supporters. Messages poured in regarding the substandard level of care that others had received at the Animal Care Center. We also learned that Lulu was not the first canine to be lost by Dr. Gray and/or her staff. I had sent three messages to Dr. Gray pleading for her assistance in locating Lulu. All messages were read by Dr. Gray and ignored. Dr. Gray and/or her staff had given Ms. Davis a few different scenarios on how Lulu got away, each one featuring a different staff member being the one that had physical control over Lulu on the day in question.

On or about June 30, 2015 I contacted a search and rescue organization in South Carolina to assist. Mr. Allen, who is a former South Carolina Police Officer and military veteran, came to assist with his bloodhounds. Meanwhile, Ms. Davis was searching the area on foot since Lulu's disappearance. The scent/tracking hounds did pick up Lulu's scent and two volunteers, Heather and Pam, were searching daily. Some days they were out for 12+ hours only to return home, rest, and come back out. During the time that Mr. Allen was searching with his hounds, Dr. Gray

gave Mr. Allen a sedative to place at the feeding stations for Lulu to consume. Dr. Gray would not release the name of the sedative to Mr. Allen or Ms. Davis. For a veterinarian to give out an unknown sedative and instruct someone to place said sedative out in the open for any member of the public to find and for other animals, feral or domestic, to come across and consume is the height of wanton disregard for the safety of the public and animals. At that point Lulu was missing three weeks and her medical condition was unknown since she was seven days post amputation surgery and with a drain placed in the surgical site and with an infection.

A hound had gone missing from the care of Dr. Gray's veterinarian practice in November 2010. This hound was never located. At that time Dr. Gray should have instituted safety measures to ensure that this would not re-occur. However, almost five years later, there was still no safety measures instituted to ensure the safety of the animals in her care. A fenced enclosure at least six feet high would have prevented the escape of Lulu and the cost to fence in an area would not be cost prohibitive.

Lulu was finally captured by Ms. Davis on July 22, 2015 after exhaustive efforts. Trail cams were purchased by my organization through donations from the public, a search/rescue organization was brought in, and Ms. Davis along with Pam and Heather logged an unimaginable number of hours with "boots to the ground" in the search for Lulu. Ms. Davis ended up at her physician for care due to the stress and exhaustion of the search for Lulu. I logged in an unimaginable number of hours pouring over Google Earth maps tracking where Lulu could be along with maintaining and fielding possible sightings. Thirty-two days – that is how many days Ms. Davis searched. We all work full time jobs, have family and pets to care for but yet we made time to help Lulu. And yet, Dr. Gray and/or her staff largely ignored the fact that Lulu was missing due to their lack of safety measures and/or training. Unless we factor in that Dr. Gray administered an unknown sedative to be placed where any member of the public, human or animal, could find and consume it.

And here we are, almost nine months later, and still Dr. Gray has not instituted safety measures such as an enclosed area to ensure that animals do not go missing. And this was after the Board "assures" me "that during the investigation your concerns were discussed with the licensee." Concerns, that just as in late 2010/early 2011, were and are once again ignored.

The Board's decision to dismiss the complaint has only enforced Dr. Gray's decision to not institute safety measures. A decision that I believe is not in the best interest of the animals or their owners. A decision which also allows Dr. Gray to not adhere to the Oath she supposedly took.

In closing, I hope and pray that another animal does not find himself/herself or another family does not find themselves in the same position as Ms. Davis and Lulu were. A simple decision by the Board directing Dr. Gray to provide a safe enclosure would have been in the best interest of the animals. Sadly, it appears that the Board does not deem the safety of animals in Dr. Gray's care to be of importance.

Respectfully submitted,



Selena Anstead

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cc: Governor Nikki R. Haley
Richelle Taylor, Director of Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners