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Animal Cruelty Investigation Results in Criminal Charges

Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri announced today that an investigation by his Humane Law Enforcement Unit (HLEU) has resulted in criminal charges against two individuals.

Todd Bencivengo, 56, of North Hanover, and Jeffrey Plunkett, 62, of Hamilton, are each charged with two counts of third-degree animal cruelty and one count of second-degree official misconduct. Bencivengo is the former supervisor of the Hamilton Township Animal Shelter. Plunkett is the current Hamilton Township health officer and department director.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's HLEU began an investigation in August 2018 after two complaints were referred to the office by the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice. The investigation revealed that between January 1, 2016 and October 1, 2018, approximately 236 cats and 93 dogs were euthanized before holding the animals or offering them for adoption for at least seven days, as required by state law.

Both men were issued summons complaints on Friday, May 3, processed at the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, and are scheduled to appear in Mercer County Superior Court on May 21.

While the HLEU's investigation of the animal shelter uncovered multiple examples of mismanagement, there was insufficient evidence to establish any additional criminal charges. Any administrative aspects of the investigation are being handled by the Hamilton Township Council.

Despite having been charged, all persons are presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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