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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **Hamilton Township Man Indicted for Animal Cruelty and Official Misconduct**

A Mercer County grand jury returned an indictment today charging Jeff Plunkett with animal cruelty and official misconduct, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office reported.

Plunkett, 63, of Hamilton, was indicted on two counts of third-degree animal cruelty and one count of second-degree official misconduct.

In May 2019, Plunkett and Todd Bencivengo, 57, of North Hanover, were each charged with two counts of third-degree animal cruelty and one count of second-degree official misconduct following an investigation by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Humane Law Enforcement Unit (HLEU). Bencivengo is the former supervisor of the Hamilton Township Animal Shelter. At the time of the alleged offenses, Plunkett was the Hamilton Township director of health and the director of the township animal shelter.

The 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.

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.

Bencivengo was accepted into the pretrial intervention program on October 23.

Despite having been indicted, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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