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May 10, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:  
including but not limited to  
Veronica Covatch, Jim Melton, and  
the National Shetland Sheepdog Association

RE: Central Ohio Sheltie Rescue, Inc.,  
Sheltie dog known as "Piper"

Dear readers:

This office represents Central Ohio Sheltie Rescue, Inc., a 501c(3) not-for-profit charitable corporation, hereinafter referred to as "COSR." COSR is a registered Animal Rescue for Dogs under Chapter 956 of the Ohio Revised Code.

Recent events and actions by people unrelated to COSR make it necessary to provide this public statement.

Since April 25, 2014, there have been internet posts, letters and e-mails, and even whole new web sites, in which there are claims made to the effect that COSR and its Director, Penny Sanderbeck, are wrongfully in possession of a dog that is being called "Piper."

The facts: "Piper" was released to COSR by the Franklin County Animal Shelter, where it had been impounded as an unlicensed stray after the required waiting period. This was done in full compliance with all applicable Ohio laws. Several days later, COSR was contacted by people claiming to have owned or possessed "Piper" before the dog was impounded by the Shelter.

As a responsible rescue, COSR asked that those people who claim rights to ownership or possession of "Piper" submit their evidence supporting those claims so that if, indeed, this dog did belong to a private owner other than COSR, it could be returned to that owner.

The only evidence that was submitted consisted of pedigree documents from the first claimant, that could pertain to hundreds if not thousands of dogs, and vet records and photos from an alleged co-owner. There are at least six (6) different people claiming to be "the rightful owner" or "co-owner."

After the microchip number was obtained by third parties from the Franklin County Animal Shelter pursuant to a public records request, one of the claimants attempted to register the microchip, but this was long after the dog was turned over to COSR.

Instead of attempting to resolve these competing claims to the ownership or possession of "Piper" in a civilized and orderly manner, a campaign of internet bullying and threats was started, and then several criminal acts were committed against Ms. Sanderbeck, including a burglary of her home.

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*Open letter*

*RE: COSR and the Sheltie dog "Piper"*

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The Columbus Police Department is investigating the burglary. They have been given all of the internet information regarding claims for "Piper." It has been learned that the burglary of Ms. Sanderbeck's home was directly related to "Piper."

Following the burglary, all of COSR's dogs were immediately placed with a licensed veterinarian for examination and monitoring, to insure that none of them had been injured during the burglary.

Then, acting on a complaint by one of the claimants asserting some right to possession or ownership of "Piper," the Franklin County Department of Animal Care and Control and the Capital Area Humane Society confirmed the safety and well-being of all COSR dogs. They found no merit in the complaint and their investigation was finally closed on May 7.

COSR acknowledges and appreciates efforts of representatives of the National Shetland Sheepdog Association to resolve this matter. However, those representatives were never willing to take any steps toward identification of the person(s) responsible for the burglary or other criminal actions against COSR, Ms. Sanderbeck, and volunteers and supporters of COSR. Further, they demanded that COSR turn "Piper" over to another rescue, and later admitted that it was their intention to return "Piper" to Veronica Covatch, who was referred to as "the rightful owner."

Many questions remain unanswered, but this much is clear: Veronica Covatch is not "the rightful owner" of Piper, nor are any of the other claimants entitled to ownership nor possession of "Piper." To the contrary, "Piper" belongs to COSR.

Because of the ongoing investigation of the criminal acts committed against COSR and Ms. Sanderbeck, **no final decision has been made concerning placement of "Piper."** COSR will not make any final placement of "Piper" until those responsible for the burglary and the internet bullying have at least been identified.

Once the investigation into the criminal acts and internet bullying is completed, COSR will make a final decision on placement of "Piper," and that placement will be made to an approved applicant for "adoption" through COSR, just as with any dog that is the property of COSR. The only limitation on this is that COSR will not consider any placement where there remains any chance that the dog could end up in the hands of any of the perpetrators of the criminal acts or any of the cyber-bullying.

**Anyone wishing to submit evidence of claimed ownership of this dog should send that evidence to our law office.**

**Also, anyone wishing to apply to adopt "Piper" from COSR should submit their application to our law office.** Applications must include either (1) evidence that the applicant has not been involved in any of the recent attacks on COSR or Ms. Sanderbeck, or (2) written agreement that decision on the application cannot be made until the investigation of the recent acts is completed.

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It seems that with the representatives of the National Shetland Sheepdog Association having withdrawn from this matter, the campaign of internet bullying and threats have resumed.

**COSR is not going to become involved in such activities. We do not intend to argue this matter on Facebook®, nor anywhere outside of a court of competent jurisdiction.**

**All further statements concerning this matter will come through our office.**

There have already been felonies committed against COSR personnel, directly incited by people on the internet. Nevertheless, they are free to express their own opinions.

Some have asserted that COSR is damaging animal rescue as a whole. The real threat comes from those who think anyone is going to volunteer with or adopt from a rescue if they could end up the target of an attack by people who want to re-claim an animal that has come legally into the ownership of an established rescue group.

As recently as yesterday (Friday, May 9, 2014), demands and threats were even being made to the Franklin County Animal Shelter. Just as with COSR, the Animal Shelter has acted in full compliance with Ohio laws, and their conduct is above reproach. The harassment of their personnel is a disgrace!

COSR has followed the law as well as the best practices of companion animal rescue, and no responsible companion animal rescue would criticize or second-guess COSR's actions in this matter.

People have every right to hold and share their own opinions on the Internet, via web site or Facebook® pages, but those rights are not absolute. They do not have a right to make false statements of fact intended to cause harm to COSR or any of its members or operations. Recent posts contain statements of fact which are demonstrably false, and the intention to harm COSR is evident from the content of those statements.

Harassment of volunteers and supporters of COSR is not going to cajole nor bully COSR. They are, and have always been, operating in compliance with all Ohio laws. Further, we will take any necessary legal action to protect the safety and continued viability of COSR.

Very Truly Yours,



JOHN A. BELL, ESQ.,  
Attorney-at-Law

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