

# CHAMPAIGN COUNTY HUMANESOCIETY

July 1, 2019

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Dear Meghan,

I'm very sorry about the grief you are feeling over your lost cat and the frustration you are feeling about the process we are engaged in. We understand the depth of the human-animal bond and how wonderful it would be for you to be reunited with your beloved companion. If yours had been the only claim of ownership of Fiore, this matter would have been resolved already. However, this is a unique situation in which we have two claimants who are certain Fiore belongs to them, both emotionally invested in having their animal returned to them.

When I spoke with you and Stephanie Baker on Friday, I indicated that we needed some time to sort out the two claims we've received regarding Fiore. That is, your claim that Fiore is your cat, who you lost in May of 2018, and the claim of another person (hereinafter referred to as the "Second Claimant"), who lost her cat in May of this year.

I stressed to you that it would take some time to sort all this out. I have since become aware that you have been disseminating information on Facebook that is inaccurate regarding the current status of our efforts to resolve this matter, and thus I am following up with you today in writing to re-iterate some of the ground we have already covered and bring you up-to-date on where things currently stand.

### ***Legal Status of Fiore***

Fiore was picked up as a stray by a Champaign County Animal Control (CCAC) officer on May 31, 2019, in a town outside Champaign/Urbana. He did not have a micro-chip and was not wearing a collar. He was at CCAC for the standard "stray hold" of 5 days. At the expiration of the prescribed hold period, he became the property of Champaign County Animal Control and they had the legal right to adopt him out, transfer him to another agency, or euthanize him. CCAC offered to transfer Fiore to us, we accepted that offer, and he was transferred to us on June 6, 2019. At that point, we became the legal owner of Fiore.

*continued*



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Upon arrival at our facility we began treating Fiore for an upper respiratory infection, ear mites, and several wounds and injuries. On June 24, 2019 he was neutered and on June 25th he was placed up for adoption.

### ***Our Responsibility***

As stated above, once an animal is transferred to us from CCAC we become the legal owner of the animal with all rights and responsibilities of ownership.

Our primary responsibility to all of the animals in our care is two-fold: (1) to provide them with the highest quality care that we possibly can, and (2) to place them in stable loving homes where they will thrive for the rest of their lives. Any person seeking to adopt an animal that is the legal property of CCHS is required to go through our adoption application process. A claim of prior ownership will certainly be considered in evaluating an application (and we scan every animal for a micro-chip to make sure there isn't an owner out there somewhere), but such a claim in and of itself will not be determinative. We have no legal obligation to return an animal to a former owner.

This has been an effective approach over the many decades we've been rehoming animals and it has earned us the respect and trust of our supporters and the public. We are not willing to deviate from an adoption process that protects animals based on a person's unverified statements or due to public pressure.

Our highest priority in this case is to do what is in the best interest of Fiore. We are extremely sympathetic to both you and the Second Claimant. Everyone who works at CCHS - as staff, volunteer, or board member - is or has been a pet owner and fully appreciates the pain, frustration, and helplessness one feels when a beloved pet is lost. We are doing our best to consider the evidence of ownership submitted by both owners. As this evidence is inconclusive at this time, our efforts are ongoing and Fiore remains in our care at the shelter.

### ***Current Status and Correction of Facts***

During our conversation on Friday, I informed you that we had invited the Second Claimant to come to the shelter that day to meet Fiore and present her evidence of ownership.

The Second Claimant arrived at the shelter on Friday afternoon and provided pictures of her lost cat and some additional information that led us to believe it is likely that Fiore is her lost cat.

Our Shelter Manager (Karen Simmons) spoke with you late Friday and arranged to speak with you again early Saturday to discuss the next steps. The Saturday morning call ended abruptly. When Karen called your number back, she was directed to voice mail and left a message. Our feeling at that time was that the weight of the Second Claimant's evidence (photos and circumstances) favored a determination that Fiore is in fact her cat. However, we would still concede that the evidence is not 100% conclusive. Our intent was to invite you to the shelter to review the Second Claimant's photos and pertinent details of her claim. At the same time, we continued to research the possibility of obtaining DNA testing.

At no time did we promise Fiore to the Second Claimant or any other adopter.



### ***DNA Testing***

As I stated to you previously, we have never before pursued feline DNA testing to prove a cat's genetic link to a parent or sibling and needed to do some research to determine (1) if such testing is possible and is available to the public; (2) where and how we could submit DNA samples; (3) how much it would cost; and (4) how long it would take to obtain results. We appreciate that you have offered to pay for the tests, however that's not necessary and we are happy to cover the cost.

As of this morning, we have identified a provider for such testing and I would like to speak with you to discuss how we can collect and submit the necessary samples from Fiore and one of the parents of your lost cat. Because the DNA test results will be the final determination of the validity of your claim of prior ownership, it is essential that we all feel confident in the integrity of the process used for obtaining and submitting the samples. Please call me at your earliest convenience to discuss our next steps (217-344-7297). After the samples are received by the testing facility, it should take 7 to 10 days to get results.

### ***Legal Action, Social Media, and Local News***

In light of the misinformation circulating through social media, your email regarding obtaining legal counsel, and the contact we have had from WCIA News, I have copied the following individuals on this letter:

George Amaya, CCHS Board President  
Darren Taylor, Esq., CCHS Board Member and Legal Counsel  
Karen Simmons, Shelter Manager  
Daniella Misa, Adoptions Supervisor

This letter will also be shared with WCIA News and may be shared with other media outlets upon inquiry. It may also be posted on our website as we deem it necessary for the clarification of facts and protection of our reputation.

At this time we also request that you cease posting inaccurate statements of fact and statements identifying and/or disparaging CCHS employees on Facebook or any other social media. The posting that has already occurred has not been helpful and has put at least two of our employees at risk of personal attack and harassment. If such posting continues we will not hesitate to take whatever legal action is appropriate to protect our employees and organization.

I continue to be sympathetic to the distress you are feeling over this matter and look forward to resolving the ownership question via DNA testing.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation while we continue working to resolve this.

Sincerely,



Mary Tiefenbrunn, Esq.  
Executive Director