

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: 5/30/2024

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director

Subject: From the Executive Zoo Director, requesting passive review of a professional services contract amendment that will exceed \$100,000 but is less than \$300,000 for veterinarian relief services with Dr. Taylor Bliss for a term beginning July 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024

File Type: Action Report

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**REQUEST**

The Executive Zoo Director is requesting passive review of a professional services contract amendment that will exceed \$100,000 but is less than \$300,000 for veterinarian relief services with Dr. Taylor Bliss for a term beginning July 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024.

**POLICY**

Wisconsin State Statutes:	59.52(31) (b)(1)(2)
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	MCGO Chapter 32.25
Specific Adopted Budget:	2024 Adopted Budget

**BACKGROUND**

The 2024 Budget includes one position of Senior Staff Veterinarian and two Associate Veterinarian positions that lead the veterinary team, providing care for over 2,000 specimens. Zoo animals require care 365 days per year, often after regular business hours. As a result, Zoo veterinarians regularly must work weekends and County holidays.

Since 2023, the Zoo's two Associate Veterinarian positions have been vacant. Finding qualified zoo veterinarians to fill these positions has been challenging due to a shortage of trained zoo veterinarians as well as a large amount of vacant zoo veterinarian positions across the country (>15) that have been open intermittently during 2023-2024. In order to ensure veterinary coverage of the zoo 365 days per year and optimal veterinary care for the animals, we have been using a relief zoo veterinarian as a temporary solution until these positions can be filled.

Two Associate Veterinarians have accepted job offers with starting dates of July 29 and October 28 due to finishing their education and taking their board examinations to

become board-certified. Providing proper veterinarian coverage until the new employees are in place requires additional relief veterinarian coverage. The 2023-2024 contract with Dr. Taylor Bliss is estimated to reach \$126,498 and is over the \$100,00 threshold requiring passive review from the County Board of Supervisors.

### **ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses: Dr. Taylor Bliss is a women-owned sole proprietor.
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities: With the ability to contract for relief veterinarian services, the Senior Staff Veterinarian will have a better work-life balance, and the constant stress of being short-staffed will be reduced. The job of zoo veterinarians continues to get more demanding with increased welfare standards, documentation, publication, and research expectations. This profession is also known to be very stressful with a high rate of suicide among its members. Additional coverage from the relief veterinarian will allow the Senior Veterinarian to complete daily tasks during normal business hours, barring emergencies, and provide more protected time off without being “on call” every evening, which will keep the veterinarian healthy, both physically and mentally.
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability: Allowing for relief veterinarian coverage will provide a healthier working environment for the animal hospital staff.

### **FISCAL EFFECT**

The contract with Dr. Taylor Bliss for veterinarian services began in 2023 and will continue into 2024 until the two vacant Associate Veterinarian positions are filled. The total contract cost is estimated at \$126,498 and is offset with savings from the two vacant positions.

### **TERMS**

The contract amendment is for the period of July 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024.

### **VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director, [Amos.Morris@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:Amos.Morris@milwaukeecountywi.gov)  
Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director, [Vera.Westphal@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:Vera.Westphal@milwaukeecountywi.gov)  
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Tracey Dolphin, Director of Animal Management & Health  
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**PREPARED BY:**

Vera Westphal  
Christy Rettenmund

**APPROVED BY:**

Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director *Amos D Morris, Jr.*

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Report, Fiscal Note, DRAFT Contract Amendment

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk  
David Crowley, County Executive  
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive  
Liz Sumner, Comptroller  
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services  
Joseph Lamers, Director of Performance, Strategy & Budget  
Michelle Nate, Deputy Comptroller  
Steve Cady, Research and Policy Director, Comptroller's Office  
Ciara Miller, Research Analyst, Comptroller's Office  
Anthony Rux, Budget and Management Analyst, DAS-PSB  
Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director  
Tracey Dolphin, Director, Animal Management & Health  
Christy Rettenmund, Senior Staff Veterinarian