

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: 2/1/2023

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

From: Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director, Milwaukee County Zoo

Subject: From the Executive Zoo Director requesting approval to create 1.0 FTE Associate Veterinarian position

File Type: Action Item

REQUEST

The Executive Zoo Director is requesting to create one position of Associate Veterinarian to provide needed veterinary coverage to allow veterinary staff a better work-life balance, to advance the Zoo's involvement in research and conservation medicine, and to grant employees the ability to use their accrued holiday time as off time.

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statutes:	Chapter 59.17
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Chapter 17.05(1)
Specific Adopted Budget:	2023 Adopted Budget

BACKGROUND

The 2023 Budget includes one Senior Staff Veterinarian and one Associate Veterinarian position who 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. When one veterinarian is on leave or vacation, the 24-hour care for the Zoo's animal population is entirely dependent on the other veterinarian, and there's no opportunity to TAHC or promote a non-veterinarian to provide this care.

With only two FT veterinarian positions to care for the Zoo's animal population, current staffing levels do not reflect best practices in veterinary care. Other peer zoos of similar size and complexity have three or more FT veterinarians, including: Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, Cincinnati Zoo, Calgary Zoo, Oregon Zoo, National Zoo, Indianapolis Zoo, Zoo Atlanta, ZooTampa at Lowry Park, Zoo Miami, Fresno Chaffee Zoo, Phoenix Zoo, Minnesota Zoo, and Brookfield Zoo.

In addition, veterinary medicine is constantly advancing. At MCZ, with limited veterinarians whose time is already at a premium, it becomes even more challenging to keep up with modern veterinary medical practices and provide exceptional care to the Zoo's animals.

Beyond veterinary care, the Zoo's veterinary team advances the profession and supports our mission by mentoring and training veterinary residence from the University of Wisconsin Veterinary School, publishing peer-reviewed research, collaborating on research with other Zoos and university partners, participating in education programs for zoo guests, and working in the field with wildlife conservation projects. Adding another full-time Associate Veterinarian will support these activities, many of which are currently infeasible or limited due to the current workload.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the strategic plan:

- 3A: Invest "upstream" to address root causes of health disparities: With an additional Associate Veterinarian, veterinary staff 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 will allow veterinary staff to complete daily tasks during normal business hours, barring emergencies, and give them more protected time off without being "on call" every evening which will keep employees healthy, both physically and mentally.
- 3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability: Creating an additional Associate Veterinarian will provide a healthier working environment for the animal hospital staff.
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities: The creation of one additional Associate Veterinarian allows an additional opportunity to mentor veterinary interns, externs, and residents. Reinforcing we are a teaching hospital and an educational resource for our community. Additionally, the Zoo's veterinary team must often decline requests to speak with students and community groups about veterinary medicine due to workload. An additional position will support the veterinary profession as a whole and provide further opportunity for future zoo veterinarians. Providing staff the ability to use their time off helps eliminate the mental fatigue and burn out which can lead to experienced veterinarians leaving the profession for a better work-life balance or less stressful career.

FISCAL EFFECT

The salary range including social security to create one additional Associate Veterinarian is \$76,243 to \$99,080. Animal care and welfare is one of the Zoo's top priorities and funding for this position will come from discontinuing the bird show contract in 2023.

TERMS

This action is requested to take effect in pay period 8 beginning on April 2, 2023.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

1. Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director Amos.Morris@milwaukeecountywi.gov
2. Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director Vera.Westphal@milwaukeecountywi.gov
3. Christy Rettenmund, Senior Staff Veterinarian
Christy.Rettenmund@milwaukeecountywi.gov
4. Joe Gaspard, Director of Animal Management and Health
Joseph.Gaspard@milwaukeecountywi.gov

PREPARED BY:

Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director
Kari Williams, Interim Director of Animal Management and Health
Christy Rettenmund, Senior Staff Veterinarian

APPROVED BY:

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

ATTACHMENTS:

None

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
Dean Legler, Director, Compensation
Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director
Christy Rettenmund, Senior Staff Veterinarian
Kari Williams, Interim Director of Animal Management and Health
Joseph Gaspard, Director, Animal Management and Health (eff 2/6/23)
Steve Cady, Research and Policy Director, Office of Comptroller
Joe Lamers, Director, Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance (SBP)
Anthony Rux, Budget and Management Analyst
Mary Polaris, HR Business Partner