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## Animal-shelter request puzzles Tulare County DA

State seeks information on an inquiry that never took place.

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**VISALIA** — The California Attorney General's Office is asking the Tulare County District Attorney for any information he has regarding the beleaguered Lindsay Animal Shelter.

Supervising Deputy Attorney General Jo Graves is asking for the paperwork reviewed by the District Attorney's Office when it decided "to decline prosecution" against the shelter.

The only problem is that the county District Attorney's Office has never been asked to review the animal mistreatment allegations that surround the city of Lindsay-operated shelter, said Tulare County District Attorney Phil Cline.

Simply put, the prosecution information sought doesn't exist, he said. The state has been misinformed. He has neither investigated the shelter matter nor considered prosecuting anyone involved with it, Cline said.

The letter, delivered to Cline Friday, also requests a copy of the Tulare County grand jury's

recent investigation of the shelter and any related transcripts. Cline plans to respond to the letter soon.

The letter was prompted after the Attorney General's Office received five letters of complaint from a local group of citizens concerned about animals at the shelter, Graves said.

It's routine to answer all complaints. A very small percentage of the complaints ever result in investigations and prosecutions, she said.

The letters ask that the office look into animal mistreatment, gross misconduct and a series of other allegations at the shelter, said Sharon Kieffer, one of the letter writers, who is trying to start a new humane shelter.

"We did it because we want something to be done," said Kieffer, who started a now-defunct volunteer group at the shelter in the early 1990s. "They need to know what's going on at the shelter."

The letters also ask the Attorney General's Office to review the actions of Lindsay Police Chief Bert Garzelli, who is in charge of the shelter; Lt. Ramon Figueroa, second in charge; and Kennel Master Wendy Jones.

The grand jury, in its annual report issued this summer, lambastes the shelter and urges the

city of Lindsay to hire a new management team to oversee it.

The civilian grand jury, a watchdog group that makes non-binding recommendations, found animal diseases such as distemper and kennel cough were spreading because of unsanitary conditions.

It also said:

- The former 72-hour holding-period policy wasn't always being followed.

- Some information on holding paperwork was falsified.

- Animals were mistakenly put to sleep.

- And animal-control officers didn't know how to handle animals.

The grand jury never asked the District Attorney's Office to look into the shelter matter, Cline said. He has told members of the group that if they could find evidence proving criminal conduct at the shelter he'd be willing to look into it.

At this point, all that's been found are regulatory violations — not criminal conduct, he said.

Lindsay city officials said they're working on the problems. In earlier interviews, Garzelli said the shelter had some problems but not to the extent the grand jury portrayed.