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Man Illegally Operating Holistic Animal Care Facility Guilty of Animal Cruelty

Nelson Zepeda Had No License to Treat Animals

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that a 44-year-old man who had been illegally operating a holistic animal care facility in Julian, has been sentenced for animal abuse, neglect and failure to care for an animal.

Nelson Andres Zepeda, who was convicted by a jury in August of six misdemeanor counts, was sentenced to probation, ordered to forfeit all seized animals to the Department of Animal Services, to pay restitution for impoundment costs and victim restitution in an amount to be determined. He was also ordered to see a psychologist/psychiatrist and follow their recommendations, as well as take an animal cruelty class and is prohibited from having animals for five years.

“Animals can’t speak for themselves, so it is our responsibility to speak up when they are hurt or mistreated,” DA Stephan said. “Our office takes allegations of animal cruelty seriously and will work with our law enforcement partners to investigate suspected abuse and hold those responsible accountable. We also rely on our community to report suspected cruelty so we can take action and help protect animals from further harm.”

In April 2025, the Department of Animal Services received a complaint about the condition of dogs and cats that resided at Urban Feline, an unlicensed holistic animal care facility operated by Zepeda. The report indicated that multiple dogs had ear mites, mange, worms, and were losing weight, all without receiving proper veterinary treatment.

Multiple dogs were reported to have died on the property. A full investigation followed, in which the Department of Animal Services learned that one dog, Roble, had died away while under Mr. Zepeda’s care for behavioral training. Photographs of Roble showed a substantial decline in his health over a year. Roble’s owner was not contacted when Roble’s health declined or when he died.

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“We’re grateful to our entire Animal Services team for bringing this severe case of neglect and abuse to light and ensuring the animals’ safety,” said Dr. Brie Sarvis, Director of County Animal Services. “This outcome reinforces our commitment to safeguarding vulnerable animals and ensuring they receive the humane treatment, protection, and compassion they deserve.”

The Department of Animal Services seized eight animals from Urban Feline: four dogs and four cats. The dogs’ conditions ranged from complete fur loss to leg fractures requiring amputation. The cats all had upper respiratory infections. Their conditions included a polyp that required surgical removal, giardia, and periodontal disease. One cat was emaciated, missing an eye, and had severe ocular discharge. He had to be humanely euthanized immediately due to the severity of his condition. The majority of the animals improved significantly upon receiving proper veterinary treatment.

“Cruelty and neglect like this have no place in our community,” DA Stephan said. “Animals deserve to be treated with care and compassion, and those who harm them must be held accountable.”

Deputy District Attorney Sarah Rowe and Deputy District Attorney William Heineken prosecuted this case.

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About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office

The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.