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For Immediate Release**

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# **Woman Charged for Allowing Aggressive Dogs to Roam North County Neighborhood**

## ***Defendant Was Warned by Officials to Remedy the Public Nuisance***

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) said today that her office has filed criminal charges against a north county woman stemming from an investigation being conducted by the county's Department of Animal Services. Debra Barkley, 68, has been charged with maintaining a public nuisance, as well as maintaining a public nuisance after being notified in writing by officials to remedy it. The charges stem from more than a dozen complaints by neighbors that the defendant's dogs are routinely allowed to escape her property unsupervised and are aggressive to community members, including children.

Barkley was arraigned on Monday and pleaded not guilty. Her next court date is a readiness hearing set for December 4 at 8:30 a.m. in Department 1 of the Superior Court in North County. Both charges are misdemeanor counts which carry a potential \$1,000 fine and up to six months in jail.

"People deserve to feel safe in their own neighborhood and working with our investigative partners at the county, we determined the situation warranted misdemeanor criminal charges based on community feedback, the facts and the evidence," said DA Stephan. "This case is being handled by the unit in our office that's been established to focus on animal cruelty cases, protect animals in our county from abuse, and hold those who would commit such offenses accountable."

There have also been complaints from the community that Barkley may have committed other animal neglect-related offenses related to horses that she maintains on a separate property. Every report of potential animal abuse is taken seriously and is investigated by the Department of Animal Services, and where the evidence supports it, is reviewed by the DA's Office for criminal charges. While the charges filed in this case relate to dogs and not horses maintained by Barkley, the charges allow for a court to order enhanced supervision and monitoring that can ultimately result in the protection of animals on all of Ms. Barkley's properties.

In 2018, DA Stephan launched the office's first-ever formalized Animal Cruelty Prosecution Unit, which provides prosecutorial consistency countywide, investigative support and

dedicated expertise for animal abuse cases. The unit works closely with police, Sheriff's deputies, Department of Animal Services, animal control officers, the San Diego Humane Society, and others to investigate and prosecute animal cruelty cases vertically (one prosecutor handling the case from beginning to end.)

Since being established, the Unit has filed 368 criminal cases related to animal cruelty. One recent high-profile prosecution focused on a man who was sentenced in March of this year to eight years in state prison for torturing and killing at least 10 cats in Escondido. In another recent case, a defendant repeatedly kicked a stranger's dog and then got into his car and ran over the dog, killing it.

Deputy District Attorney Eric Bodnar is prosecuting 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.*

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