

Tully Rinckey PLLC client Adrienne Alper discusses her case with the Virginia Pilot.

Whistleblower contests firing at Norfolk Animal Care

By Kara Driscoll July 31, 2014

A former employee of the Norfolk Animal Care Center said she was terminated for raising concerns over the treatment of animals at the shelter and has hired a lawyer to represent her. Adrienne Alper, 26, worked for the city-run shelter for about seven months before she was fired in December. She says the shelter didn't follow procedure when workers euthanized animals, and that management targeted her after she spoke up about it. She alleges that staff "often carried out euthanasia procedures in a cruel and inhumane manner." Alper said the center's own guidelines call for euthanizing animals in a quiet, relaxing setting, but employees put cats down in a large, loud room crowded with cages and other animals. She was concerned enough to reach out to Norfolk-based People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. "I talked to my immediate supervisors but they kind of brushed me off," Alper said. "They just said that it was the way they did things and the way it was done for years." Soon after she spoke out about the shelter's practices, she said she was pulled into an office and fired on the spot. City spokesman Bob Batcher declined to comment on the matter. Alper said her termination documents stated she was fired for incompetence and conduct unbecoming of a city employee. Alper said the request for termination stated she did not contact the correct officials about her concerns before going to PETA. It also alleged that Alper did not get along with co-workers and accused one of them of killing puppies, making her unfit to continue working at the center. Lawyer Rachelle L. Young, who is representing Alper, said the shelter did not have grounds to fire her. Young said she believes Alper's firing "was not merely illegal, but also a callous act." Alper said her motivation for speaking out about what she called the city's "utter disregard for their own rules" is her passion for animals. She said she doesn't regret raising the issue, even though she contends that it led to her losing her job.