

MORNING MIX

A girl refused to sell her goat for slaughter. Then came law enforcement.



By [Jonathan Edwards](#)

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Jessica Long's 9-year-old daughter brought the family's goat, Cedar, to the Shasta District Fair and Event Center in Anderson, Calif., 150 miles north of Sacramento, last year to sell him for slaughter. As the livestock auction was starting, she told her mom she couldn't bear to lose him. They took Cedar home.

Less than two weeks later, a detective with the Shasta County Sheriff's Office got a search warrant, drove hundreds of miles to seize the pet goat and returned him to Shasta County fair officials to be slaughtered.

Now, Long is suing the sheriff's office, the Shasta District Fair and Event Center and several employees with the organizations. In a 27-page complaint filed recently in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California that was first reported by [the Sacramento Bee](#), she alleges they violated her and her daughter's right to due process and their right against unreasonable search and seizure.

The court documents outline how fair officials turned to law enforcement in the days after the June auction, taking what should have been a civil property dispute into the criminal justice system, Long's attorneys told The Washington Post.

"This is a textbook case of government gone rogue," said Vanessa Shakib, a lawyer with the nonprofit Advancing Law for Animals who is representing Long and her daughter.

Christopher Pisano, a lawyer for Shasta County and the sheriff's office, declined to comment. The Shasta District Fair and Event Center did not respond Sunday to a request for comment from The Post. In his official response to Long's accusations, Pisano admitted that a warrant was issued and that two deputies then retrieved Cedar but denied nearly all of the other allegations.

In April 2022, Long bought her daughter, who was 9 at the time, a white-and-brown Boer goat. Her daughter, identified as E.L. in court documents, spent nearly three months feeding and caring for the goat, which she named Cedar. She bonded with him as if he were a puppy.

"She loved him as a family pet," the lawsuit says.

On June 24, Long and her daughter, who is a member of the 4-H program, went to the Shasta District Fair's junior livestock auction, where she exhibited Cedar for potential buyers, according to the suit. But the girl balked the following day, the final day of the auction, causing her mother to try to end their participation in the event, the suit states. Fair representatives allegedly refused to let them, saying the rules prohibited their withdrawal.

The auction went ahead and, through a representative, state Sen. Brian Dahle (R) made the winning bid for Cedar: \$902. The bid was far above market value for the meat Cedar would have provided, which is typical for bidders hoping to reward entrepreneurial young 4-H members.

The girl was distraught, the suit states. After the auction, she refused to leave the goat's side. She "loved Cedar, and the thought of him going to slaughter was something she could not bear," the suit states. Sobbing, she told her mother she couldn't send him to his death.

So she didn't.

Instead of handing Cedar over, Long took the goat and her daughter home. Before doing so, she told fair representatives she would pay for any financial hit caused by the decision to keep him, the suit states.

Since they live in an agricultural community, Long feared that pulling out of the 4-H event would lead to "negative social consequences." So, two days after sparing Cedar, she drove him more than 200 miles away to a farm in Sonoma County where he could lie low while Long smoothed things over, according to the lawsuit.

That same day, June 26, she got a call from a livestock manager at the fair, who allegedly demanded that she return Cedar and threatened to have her charged with grand theft, a felony, if she didn't.

Long pleaded, reiterating she would pay for any losses incurred by pulling out of the auction, according to her suit. The offer was rejected, Long said in the suit.

Long tried another approach. She contacted Dahle, the state senator and winning bidder, to explain the situation and request that he give up any rights he had to Cedar, the suit states. His representatives said he wouldn't oppose her efforts.

On June 27, Long sent a letter to the district fair “to get them to understand, as human beings, her position,” according to her suit. In it, she told fair officials that watching her daughter sobbing had been “heartbreaking,” that the girl had suffered through the deaths of three grandparents in the previous year and that “our family has had so much heartbreak and sadness that I couldn’t bear the thought of the following weeks of sadness after the slaughter” of Cedar. She also mentioned Dahle’s willingness to go along with her plan.

But fair officials were “unmoved” by her pleas, the suit said.

Melanie Silva, CEO of the district fair, responded the next day, according to an email provided by Long’s attorneys. She wrote that, as a mother, she was “not unsympathetic regarding your daughter and her love for her animal,” but also asking her to understand that the fair is designed “to teach our youth responsibility and for the future generations of ranchers and farmers to learn the process and effort it takes to raise quality meat.”

“Making an exception for you will only teach [our] youth that they do not have to abide by the rules that are set up for all participants,” Silva wrote in the June 28 email.

Then, law enforcement got involved. On June 29, Shasta County Sheriff’s Lt. Jerry Fernandez left a voice mail for Long, telling her he’d stopped by her house but she wasn’t home, the suit states.

On July 8, sheriff’s Detective Jeremy Ashbee applied for a warrant to search Bleating Hearts Farm and Sanctuary in Napa County, about 150 miles from the Shasta County Sheriff’s Office. To support his request, Ashbee included an image of a post from the farm’s Instagram page, an urgent plea rallying people to flood fair officials with requests to spare Cedar. A magistrate approved his application.

Later that day, Ashbee, joined by Fernandez and fellow detective Jacob Duncan, drove at least 500 miles round-trip over the course of about 10 hours “to seize a young girl’s beloved goat for slaughter,” the suit states.

Their first stop: Bleating Hearts. But Cedar wasn’t there, and never had been, according to Long’s lawyers. Even though they didn’t have a warrant to search a second location, Ashbee and company nevertheless traveled to an unspecified farm in neighboring Sonoma County where they found and seized the goat, the suit states. The sheriff’s deputies then drove him back to Shasta County and allegedly delivered him to the county fairgrounds, even though the magistrate who granted the search warrant had ordered them to retain the goat as evidence “until the end of the criminal case against Plaintiff Long,” according to the suit.

Long’s attorneys said they believe Cedar was slaughtered that night, though they are seeking confirmation of that through the lawsuit.

Losing Cedar continues to haunt Long’s daughter, Shakib told The Post.

“She is absolutely heartbroken,” she said. “It is devastating to lose a beloved pet who is a family member.”