

February 3, 2026

**OFFICE OF THE HEARING EXAMINER  
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON**  
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**REPORT AND DECISION**

SUBJECT: Regional Animal Services of King County file no. **V25017783-A25004549**

**CRISTOFER LEFFLER**  
Animal Services Enforcement Appeal

Activity no.: A25-004549

Appellant: **Cristofer Leffler**  
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Lake Forest Park, WA 98155  
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King County: Regional Animal Services of King County  
*represented by* **Chelsea Eykel**  
Regional Animal Services of King County  
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Overview

1. After hearing the witnesses' testimony and observing their demeanor, studying the exhibits admitted into evidence, and considering the parties' arguments and the relevant law, Mr. Leffler's appeal is granted.

### Procedural Background

2. On September 25, 2025, Brad Hanson filed an online complaint with Regional Animal Services of King County (Animal Services) for barking on several days. Exs. D3, D4. On October 20, Animal Services issued Notice of Violation V25017783-A25004549 to Cristofer Leffler for his dog, Hallie, making excessive noise. Ex. D5. Cristofer Leffler filed a timely appeal on November 14. Ex. D8.
3. We went to hearing on January 22, 2026. Participating in the hearing were: Sgt. Chelsea Eykel representing Animal Services, complainant Brad Hanson, their witness Melanie Paquin, and appellant Cristofer Leffler.

### Appeal Issues

Per the Notice of Hearing, the issues identified for consideration on appeal are as follows:

4. The issue on appeal is whether the October 20, 2025, violation issued for Hallie “Making Excessive Noise” 1st violation (KCC 11.04.230.K) and the associated monetary penalty are supported by a preponderance of the evidence and appropriate under the facts of this case.

### Factual Findings

Weighing all the evidence, the hearing examiner finds the following facts by a preponderance of the evidence:

5. Mr. Hanson and Ms. Paquin live next door to the Lefflers. The Lefflers own Hallie, who has a bark that Mr. Hanson and Ms. Paquin find startling, disturbing, loud, and excessive. There has been an extended history of complaints about Hallie’s barking, however, this is the first time the Lefflers have been issued a violation.
6. The violation issued by Animal Services was for “Excessive Noise 1<sup>st</sup>” with an associated \$50 penalty. Exs. D2, D5; KCC 11.04.230.K. The staff report and testimony from Sgt. Eykel specified that the incidents at issue were four “quiet hour” barking episodes. Eykel Testimony; Ex. D1. Specifically, the dates at issue are: August 12 at 11:45pm, August 21 at 10:55pm, August 26 at 10:55pm and September 2 at 10:05pm. Ex. D1.
7. Mr. Hanson provided a “barking log” which reflects the times he and Ms. Paquin noted Hallie’s barking during a five week period. Between August 11 and September 15, 2025, Hallie barked after 10pm on four occasions.
8. Mr. Hanson indicated that Hallie’s barking was “usually a short duration” which he defined as between “2-5 minutes.” Hanson Testimony. He acknowledged that the Leffler's do “try to recall the dog.” *Id.*

9. Mr. Hanson testified that the houses are very close, that he and Ms. Paquin go to sleep at 10, are both “fairly light sleepers,” and that the barking is very disruptive to their sleep and “lifestyle here on the lake.” Hanson Testimony. Mr. Hanson indicated that during the summer, they sleep with the windows open so the barking carries into the house. *Id.*
10. Mr. Hanson indicated that, in terms of impacts to them, the barking on the four evenings in question either startled them or made it difficult to go back to sleep. *Id.*
11. Ms. Paquin also characterized Hallie’s barking as “startling” and “disruptive.” Paquin Testimony. She stated: “It’s not our dog so we don’t really want the noise.” *Id.* She described what she believed to be a “pretty chaotic situation... one person will be home and let the dog out and the dog will bark and then someone else will come home and let the dog out and it will bark an hour later.” *Id.*
12. Ms. Paquin seemed particularly concerned that she didn’t know when Hallie might start barking again. *Id.* She indicated that it wasn’t just the barking for a couple of minutes but the stress of then wondering if Hallie would start again in 30 minutes or an hour. *Id.*
13. Mr. Leffler does not dispute that Hallie barks and he apologized for the impacts caused to his neighbors. However, he asserts that Hallie's barking does not meet the unreasonable disturbance threshold.
14. He stated that he installed sound and motion cameras because of the neighbor’s prior complaints. He checked the sound activation for the four incidents at issue and the cameras were not triggered, but recognizes he “cannot prove a negative.” He indicated he also spoke with other neighbors and they did not have concerns with Hallie’s barking.
15. Mr. Leffler has taken additional measures to mitigate Hallie's barking which, by all accounts, are working. They now do not let Hallie off-leash in the backyard during quiet hours to avoid barking at night.

#### Conclusions of Law

16. The hearing examiner has jurisdiction pursuant to KCC 20.22.040.
17. Animal Services bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of evidence both the violation and the appropriateness of the remedy it has imposed. KCC 20.22.080.G; .210.B. We do not grant substantial weight or otherwise accord deference to agency determinations. Exam. R. XV.F.3.
18. It is a public nuisance for a dog to “make noise, to an unreasonable degree, in such a manner as to disturb a person or neighborhood.” KCC 11.04.230.K. Barking is much more likely to be found disruptive and unreasonable if it is during “quiet hours.”
19. Animal Services has, in effect, adopted the County's construction noise "quiet hours" in KCC 12.86.520. While this is appropriate to identify the times during which people have a reasonable expectation of reduced animal noise, it is important not to lose sight of the

qualitative differences between construction noise and what is reasonable to expect from a domesticated animal. Construction noise is consolidated during daytime working hours and may be continual during that time but is expected to be nonexistent during the identified quiet hours.

20. That is not the standard or expectation for animal noise. Dogs live with us 24 hours a day. They need to go outside. They make noise. As Mr. Leffler succinctly stated, "dogs bark." The parties live in an urban area where houses are close together, neighbors have pets, and yards have exciting visitors like racoons and rabbits. The law does not require, and we cannot reasonably expect, that dogs will be completely silent after 10pm.
21. The question is what amount of noise from Hallie becomes "unreasonable." The violation focused on the 4 incidents identified in the log which were after 10pm (one of which was at 10:05pm) between August 11 and September 15, 2025. Ex. D5. Mr. Hanson's testimony that the quiet hours barking is "usually a short duration" which he defined as between "2-5 minutes." Hanson Testimony.
22. So the question becomes: is Hallie barking for between 2-5 minutes during quiet hours on four occasions over the course of five weeks "unreasonable." I cannot conclude that this limited amount of barking, both in duration and frequency, is unreasonable.
23. In analyzing whether noise truly "disturbs" we apply an objective "unreasonableness" standard and avoid enabling any given complainant to make a "subjective determination" of a noise violation. *City of Spokane v. Fischer*, 110 Wn.2d 541, 544–45, 754 P.2d 1241 (1988). Similarly, our Court instructs us to guard against measuring conduct "by its effect on those who are inordinately timorous or belligerent." *Seattle v. Eze*, 111 Wn.2d 22, 29–30, 759 P.2d 366 (1988). And in looking at both "unreasonable" and "disturb," we review the steps an appellant took to control the noise and the steps a complainant took to mitigate the noise's impact. *State v. Acrey*, 148 Wn.2d 738, 748-49, 64 P.3d 594 (2003) ("reasonable" depends on balancing competing interests).
24. The impacts to Mr. Hanson and Ms. Paquin reflect that they "go to bed about 10 o'clock" and the barking wakes them up or startles them. If they are woken up it is difficult to go back to sleep. While I don't doubt that the barking is startling or wakes the complainants up if they are asleep when it occurs, it is the infrequency and short duration of the barking that makes it fall short of "unreasonable."
25. This is not a situation where Hallie is being left outside every night, or even every week, to bark for extended periods of time. The barking log shows this is happening less than once a week, for a couple of minutes. Barking of a short duration like that exhibited by Hallie is typically indicative of reasonable "alert barking" from a dog—alerting the presence of potential predator, or alerting owners she wants to come inside. This is distinguishable from the chronic boredom or distress barking that is more typical for noise violations. *See Bishop*, A23-6882. And Ms. Hanson acknowledged that the Leffler's do promptly recall Hallie, which is consistent with the relatively short duration of the barking episodes.

26. Moreover, Mr. Hanson and Ms. Paquin are admittedly light sleepers and, as these were summer evenings, likely had their windows open as Mr. Hanson indicated was common for them. They did not indicate they have employed any type of white noise machine or taken other steps to mitigate the noise impacts on their end. It is also relevant that neither of the other neighboring homeowners found Hallie’s barking objectionable.
27. The concern expressed by Ms. Paquin that even when Hallie stops barking, they don't know if she will start again in 30 minutes or later that evening is unfounded. Looking at the barking log, there are no cases of repeat barking during quiet hours after an earlier barking incident that evening.
28. Ms. Paquin’s statement that Hallie is “not our dog so we don’t really want the noise” sums up the issue here. It is not Hallie’s barking that is unreasonable, at least as to the four incidents that compose the violation appealed by Mr. Leffler. It is unreasonable for the complainants to expect to be free from noise from their neighbors’ dog, who lives 5 feet away. There certainly could be a level of barking from Hallie that rises to the level of unreasonably disruptive. But the facts supporting the four instances that comprise the violation on appeal do not meet that threshold.
29. The Leffler’s have taken steps to mitigate Hallie’s barking and the noise has been less of an issue in recent months. Hopefully that continues and Mr. Hanson’s concern about the increase in episodes during the summer does not materialize.

DECISION:

1. Mr. Leffler’s appeal is GRANTED.

ORDERED February 3, 2026.



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Devon Shannon  
Hearing Examiner

**NOTICE OF RIGHT TO APPEAL**

King County Code 20.22.040 directs the Examiner to make the County’s final decision for this type of case. This decision shall be final and conclusive unless appealed to superior court in accordance with Ch. 7.16 RCW. It is the responsibility of the party seeking to appeal the examiner’s decision to determine and meet the legal requirements for filing an appeal.

**MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 22, 2026, HEARING IN THE APPEAL OF  
CRISTOFER LEFFLER, REGIONAL ANIMAL SERVICES OF KING COUNTY  
FILE NO. V25017783-A25004549**

Devon Shannon was the Hearing Examiner in this matter. A verbatim recording of the hearing is available in the Hearing Examiner’s Office.

The following exhibits were offered by Animal Services and entered into the record:

- Exhibit no. D1           Regional Animal Services of King County staff report
- Exhibit no. D2           RASKC investigation report no. A25004549
- Exhibit no. D3           Online Complaint form of multiple dates by Brad Hanson, dated  
September 25, 2025
- Exhibit no. D4           Barking Log
- Exhibit no. D5           Notice of violation no. V25017783-A25004549, issued October 20, 2025
- Exhibit no. D6           RASKC investigation report no. A25003584
- Exhibit no. D7           Online Complaint form of multiple dates in July 2025 by Brad Hanson,  
dated August 3, 2025
- Exhibit no. D8           Appeal, received November 14, 2025
- Exhibit no. D9           Map of subject area

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

SUBJECT: Regional Animal Services of King County file no. **V25017783-A25004549**

**CRISTOFER LEFFLER**

Animal Services Enforcement Appeal

I, Lauren Olson, certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that I transmitted the **REPORT AND DECISION** to those listed on the attached page as follows:

- EMAILED to all County staff listed as parties/interested persons and parties with e-mail addresses on record.
- placed with the United States Postal Service, through Quadient-Impress, with sufficient postage, as FIRST CLASS MAIL in an envelope addressed to the non-County employee parties/interested persons to addresses on record.

DATED February 3, 2026.



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Lauren Olson  
Legislative Secretary

**Brad Hanson, Melanie Paquin**

Hardcopy

**Eykel, Chelsea**

Regional Animal Services of King County

**Leffler, Cristofer**

Hardcopy