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Halfway Home Pet Rescue, Inc. P.O. Box 488, Caribou, Maine 04736

I will start by apologizing in advance for being truthful. I do not play head games. I accept blame for my own mistakes. I am not known as being politically correct. I believe one can only solve a problem by dealing with the truth. This Help Fix Me problem is hurting the very people it was set up to help. I ask you -- please deal with it.

More than a year ago the Maine State Legislature Agriculture Committee mandated that AWP (Animal Welfare Program) turn the administration of the Help Fix Me Program over to a third party group with the ability to manage the program effectively. This has not been done, in fact, AWP has stalled the process, imposed meaningless and cumbersome new rules and have not turned the money or the management of the program over to a 3rd party even though several groups and have shown an interest and was supposed to be done by August 2022. The entire program has been TECHNICALLY SHUT DOWN for almost a full year. Where has the money gone. Where did the \$500,000 short-fall of income of last year that Senator Dill demanded be returned to the program go. It has never been returned that I can see. Currently, 15% of program income is allowed for administration. I would like to see exactly what amount is being used for the current AWP management compared to what is being used for HFM vouchers. We never see a complete budget.

I have edited (x4) my testimony to dilute my anger. I have noticed that this AWP has played games with the AG Committee this past year. In my opinion, they have come very close to illegal and have practiced several unethical policies with the program. They have not followed The AG Committee mandates. The Help Fix Me program was set up to give sterilization surgeries to stray, abandoned, feral cat colonies and other owned pets belonging to low-income families. When a person calls the HFM office you get a recording telling you "the popularity of the program has created a shortage of vouchers" when in truth very few vouchers have been given out since last April 2022.

Then the above recording directs the caller to call "SpayMaine for help." A few people in Aroostook County have even been directed to Halfway Home Pet Rescue although it is more likely those calls are directed by area vet clinics. Halfway Home Pet Rescue accomplished over 500 free spay/neuters in 2021 and over 800 in 2022. If a small group of volunteers can do this --What is AWP's problem? Why doesn't the AWP professionals write a few grants to get over this financial problem they talk about? Halfway Home Pet Rescue has now been promised some vouchers for our two large Free Spay/Neuter Clinics scheduled in May 2023. I don't expect to see these vouchers in May because for almost 10 years I have had nothing but broken promises and I have stopped looking forward to fairness in the program -- an actual sign of change. But the HFM process has actually become unworthy of the State of Maine. Recently the AWP started sending out vouchers to large clinics in the lower part of the state, but none for the individual families it was set up to serve. Halfway Home Pet Rescue procures grants to help pay for our Free Spay/Neuter Clinics if the grants run out then we are finished.

All these dollars donated and allocated for the care of abused, stray, ill, injured and unwanted animals has gone somewhere and NO ONE IS SAYING WHERE THAT MONEY HAS GONE but just that the money will go to large clinics. What happened to the individual low-income pet owner. These are the animals this money was supposed to protect. The entire state of Maine only has 2 or 3 mobile vet clinics. What about the low-income family in Frenchville, Ashland, and hundreds of other small towns located in Maine -- ALL OF MAINE.

No one has to RE-INVENT THE WHEEL. There are management options out there and people who are ready to step up to the program's needs. Why hasn't AWP followed the mandates of the AG Committee from last year? How dare they change the rules as the rules were never a problem. The problem has always been the AWP management and still is.

Respectfully,

Norma Milton
Caribou
LD 595

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2/27/2023 Department of Agriculture

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