

Casey Cole
Portland
LD 595

I'm Dr. Casey Cole: I'm the chairperson of the Animal Welfare Advisory Council and I am writing in opposition of LD 595. I have had extensive experience with the Help Fix ME program since 2014 in various capacities. From 2014-2017, I worked in a general practice in Pittsfield, Maine that accepted the Help Fix ME vouchers. During my last year at that practice, I was the sole surgeon and was in the top 3 clinics in the state for procedures performed. From 2017-2019 I served as a member of AWAC and was involved in discussions around the challenges of administering the program. I also serve on the board of directors of the MVMA and have been involved in several discussions that Animal Welfare Directors have had with the board about their opinions on the program. On account of this, I understand the major issues facing the program from both the position of a veterinarian and of the administrator of the program.

The two most challenging aspects of administering the program are keeping track of vouchers and managing an unpredictable cash flow. The voucher program was great and has achieved a lot for the state, but it has caused some major issues in the past. Around 4-5 years ago, there were fake vouchers being produced. Clinics accepted them, and as the department had to honor them the program went into deficit for a long period of time while we sought a solution to the problem. This hasn't been an issue since, but could realistically happen again. Additionally, the way the vouchers are set up (they partially pay for elective options that the clients can decline) makes it difficult to predict exactly how much money is being sent out for any period of time. The cash flow is difficult to determine as it comes sporadically throughout the year which makes it impossible to plan for the future. When these two issues are combined, it creates a system that requires constant attention and is prone to drastic swings in budget.

When the new rules were proposed, we elected for the prepay option as it completely removes one of these roadblocks to care. Additionally, it has the added benefit of addressing the delay in payment that a lot of veterinarians were experiencing. During the rules making process, the concerns about this system were heard and now the new rules allow for either prepay or voucher payment. This will allow needed flexibility in the program.

LD 595 is only going to achieve a further delay in moving the program over to a third party, while also making it challenging to quickly and efficiently adapt the program to changing needs in the future. If you have any questions about the HelpFix ME program I'd be happy to answer them at the work session.

Casey Cole BVM

Chair, Animal Welfare Advisory Council