

TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST L.D. 498 "Resolve to Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities"
Committee On Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
February 27, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony neither for nor against to L.D. 498 "Resolve to Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities."

As someone who operated a dog rescue in Maine for over a decade, I know firsthand that an organization or individual working to house and care for live animals can easily take on too much or become overwhelmed. This is true not only for dog rescue and shelter entities, but also for breeding kennels, boarding kennels, and sporting dog kennels.

After testifying on this bill two years ago, I am aware that this effort is in response to one animal shelter. However, to ensure humane treatment and public safety. uniform standards of care should apply to ALL animal-specific operations (for profit and nonprofit)

From my own experience in rescue, I know that the state or municipality already has the ability to limit the number of animals under a shelter or kennel license based on the space, shelter and other factors present at the time of the required inspection for licensing and renewal. Additionally, in 2022, the Animal Welfare Program underwent rule making resulting in Capacity for Care standards for all shelters and kennels that are licensed by the state. I believe these rules address some of the concerns that the proposed resolve wishes to solve.

STAFF-TO-ANIMAL RATIOS - Requiring a staff-to-animal ratio is a good concept for ALL licensed shelters AND kennels that house animals in one location. However, it is also important to note that many of the private rescues in the state use foster homes to house dogs and cats to be placed for adoption. This means that the animals are not living in one location/at a central kennel where a caretaker-animal ratio could be implemented, but stay in various volunteer private homes around the state until adopted.

Questions:

- How would these rules be applied to foster based organizations?
- A municipally licensed kennel in Norridgewock has almost 50 dogs living outside chained to dog houses cared for by one senior caretaker with health challenges. Would these rules apply to that situation?
- In 2019, the state seized 107 dogs living in squalor and overcrowded conditions from a breeding kennel in Solon ME, If this bill moves forward, would the staff-to-animal ratio clause apply to prevent a similar situation?

RETURN OF ADOPTED / SOLD ANIMALS - Caution is suggested when considering regulations that impact animals adopted out by a shelter or sold by a breeding kennel, that are returned multiple times. Animals are returned frequently for reasons unrelated to the animal itself...someone passes away, someone moves, someone has allergies or has to work too many hours. Some of these return risk factors can be mitigated through careful placement screening, and post adoption / sale follow-up, but not all. Additionally, Maine has in depth dangerous dog regulations that would be applicable in the instance that a dog is returned due to aggressive behavior.

In closing, I support staff-to-animal ratios if applied to all licensed animal shelter and kennel operations in Maine. For the reasons cited above, I believe that the suggested return clause should be removed from the bill text before voting the proposed legislation forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susanna Richer, Portland, ME