

The Honorable Senator Talbot-Ross, the Honorable Representative Pluecker and esteemed members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee.

My name is Stacy Shaffer and I am testifying in support of Bill 498, Resolve to Improve Standards for Animal Rescues. Animal rescues operating under minimal and ineffective oversight are a large and ever increasing problem in the State of Maine. Work must be done to address this issue, for both the welfare of the animals and the citizens of Maine.

Animal rescues are big business, allowed to operate under minimal regulatory oversight. Due to financial constraints and lack of zoning regulations in many of our small rural towns and unorganized territories, Maine has become a desirable location for those looking to operate a rescue. For a hundred dollars licensing fee anyone can operate an animal rescue, no experience or training required. While a kennel license limits the owner to a maximum of ten dogs, there is no limit on the number of animals housed at a rescue. While the rescue concept is to place the animals in foster care until a permanent home is located that is often not the case, leaving one person to care for a large number of animals. One such rescue located in Central Maine at times has had as many as one hundred to one hundred and fifty dogs. I own a dog, as I am sure many of you do as well, and as a dog owner I know, and I think you would agree, one person can not possibly meet the needs of such a large number of animals. With no capacity of care language in the regulations, it could just have easily have been any number of dogs. We recognize the need for ratios in kennels as well as in a number of other professions, such as nursing, education and child care. We recognize one nurse can only meet the medical needs of a limited number of patients, one teacher can only effectively educate a limited number of students, one childcare provider can only meet the needs of a limited number of children and one kennel owner can only meet the needs of ten dogs, yet a rescue can have an unlimited number of dogs. If you think the rescue I referenced is an outlier, I would like to draw your attention to the following news headlines: 100 Animals Seized From a Property in Solon, Maine Authorities Seize 83 Cats, 25 Dogs Among Animals Seized From Home in Hampden. While the towns need to have better zoning ordinances to prevent these situations from arising, the fact is they happen all over Maine and the common denominator is Maine Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Maine Animal Welfare Program. Is the problem really with the towns or with the State of Maine's enforcement of existing laws. I worked for years in a highly regulated industry and in order for a regulation to effectively do its job it must be objective and measurable and unfortunately what limited standards that currently exist are subjective in nature. Subjective regulations are open to the discretion of the licensing agent, leading to inconsistency in enforcement as well as failure to provide dog rescue business owners the information they need to operate under best practices. The Department of Agriculture must support Animal Welfare in proactively addressing these situations, not just in being reactive.

While there are excellent animal rescues in the state, and I recognize and applaud them, many individuals rescue dogs and other animals for the wrong reasons. Animal hoarding disorder is a mental health diagnosis that is on the rise. Others enter into animal rescue because of the appeal of being able to run what can be a very financially profitable business with a low initial financial investment and minimal oversight, while others have the best of intentions and just get in over their heads. Whatever the reason, animal welfare is charged with making sure all animal rescues remain in compliance with regulations set forth for the welfare of the animals and they are not currently meeting this goal.

Rescues are big business and their merchandise for sale is dogs. Keep in mind, the majority of these animals are being imported from out of state as well as out of the country to be sold for five hundred to six hundred dollars a dog. Like any business, the lower the initial cost the higher the profit margin. This is a business model ripe for abuse. Corners are cut and safety is sacrificed every step of the way. Dogs are imported from foreign countries such as Oman and Afghanistan without following transport and isolation protocols making all of us susceptible to the introduction of zoonotic diseases, such as Screwworm, Foot and Mouth Disease and Rabies. Semi-feral and aggressive dogs that have not

received the benefits of foster care or a temperamental screening are sold to unsuspecting families. I remind you these dogs, just a few short weeks prior to being sold, were surviving on the streets, often in a foreign country. Dogs returned to the rescue for aggression, are quickly sold again to another unsuspecting family.

I have attached pictures of a licensed dog rescue, currently in operation in Maine. I have filed numerous complaints to animal welfare about this situation and have offered to meet with a representative of the department. I have received no follow up and have no way of knowing if my complaints were investigated but what I do know is conditions at this rescue have not improved. It should be noted, these pictures were put out into the public domain by the owner of the rescue on the business' Facebook page (Give a Dog a Home). I ask you to take a moment of your time to look at these pictures and I think you will agree multiple animals in one small enclosure, animals living in their own waste and being hosed down in winter are not acceptable practices. If I hadn't told you where these photos were taken, you may have mistaken them for a PETA commercial.

Despite the large number of rescues, shelters and humane societies, it is increasingly difficult to voluntarily surrender an animal in Maine. This is because the animals currently being housed and sold in Maine originated elsewhere, often a foreign country. Our local animal control officer drives an hour for placement of a stray animal, specifically because of the abhorrent conditions at the local rescue. How are these non-profit rescue businesses serving the residents of the state of Maine? They are not and, in fact, they are a drain on the states limited resources.

While I am sympathetic to the challenges of monitoring and enforcing tighter licensing regulations, it can and must be done. Other regulated industries have been able to successfully accomplish this. Failure to do so will only result in more very public animal seizure situations. These seizures only occur after neighbors have filed numerous complaints to the department and the animals have suffered horrible neglect and abuse. Would it not make more sense to address these situations before they reach crisis level. Thank you for your time. I am available for questions and am available to assist in anyway to address this concern. I can be reached at (207) 279-6134.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Stacy Shaffer*