

Dear Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry committee. My name is Charles Shaffer and I live in Sebec. I am testifying today in support of LD 498; **Resolve, To Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities.** First off, I would like to thank Representative Perkins for sponsoring this bill and recognizing that this is an important issue to Maine citizens.

Animal rescues are a topic that has come before this committee several times in the previous 2 sessions, and we are here again because this topic remains an important issue statewide. If anything, it is a growing issue. I call your attention to a recent proposal before this committee LD 133, **An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Nuisance Dogs.**

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Maine has some of the strictest requirements in the nation regulating breeding kennels and so-called puppy mills, with the intent of providing humane treatment of animals. However, an unintended consequence of these regulations is that it has created a dearth of animals that are available for adoption by Maine residents. To fill this gap, Maine has become a haven for “rescues” and “shelters” that scoop up feral animals from the streets and shelters of other states or countries in order to sell them to Maine residents. Oddly enough, even though Maine has strict requirements for actual breeders, pet stores, kennels and farming enterprises, these “shelters” operate with minimal oversight and regulation by state and local government.

One example I am aware of is an operation currently located in central Maine. This business moved to Maine from Texas, where it acquired dogs from animal shelters in the San Antonio, Dallas and Fort Worth area and market them to customers across several states and Canada. This business had many issues complying with local regulations and animal welfare standards in Texas, so they moved to Maine specifically

because many of the smaller towns have no zoning and minimal oversight. They continued to acquire dogs from Texas as well as expanded to include dogs from other countries, such as China, Korea, Oman and Afghanistan. We are not talking about someone who saves a few animals from wandering the streets, these are major operations trafficking dogs to sell to the public. At this shelter, there can be more than 100 dogs at any one time. These animals are taken care of by 1 person. They are transported to the business directly from Texas or wherever and often do not follow any type of quarantine or separation of newly arrived animals from the current animals already at the kennel, no screening for temperament, nothing. They immediately placed for sale on the internet.

Why come to Maine? It's simple, to secure a license to operate a "rescue/shelter", it's an easy application process and a low license fee. The operator has only to provide access to food, water and shelter. There are no minimum size requirements of the facility, no requirements for space, no requirement that aggressive animals be segregated from the others, no requirement that the actual dog area be separate from any area of human habitation and no requirement of any staff to animal ratio. Think about it; there are ratios for many types of direct services. Medical staff to patients, teachers to students, daycare workers to children, etc., etc. There are often limits on the minimum square footage needed to adequately provide for the health and safety of a given population. Call something a rescue, tug at some heart strings and the rules seem to go out the window. Until there is a problem. The Humane Agents employed by the state that oversee these operations have considerable discretion in enforcing any type of regulations and often do not take any action until there is some type of crisis. The news is full of these types of incidents around the country. This shelter also often takes pregnant dogs from the Texas shelters in

order to have puppies to sell, in direct violation of Maine's rules that regulate pet stores. Again, with no consequences.

It is not required that the operator of a rescue/shelter have any education, experience, or training before going into business. All you need is a computer. There are no standards and of course it is a very lucrative business. You get the dogs free and sell them for \$500 to \$700 each. ACO's, animal welfare and town officials have a lot of discretion in deciding whether to pursue actions against shelters/rescues because there are no uniform standards currently in state law or rule for guidance. There are in fact national standards, the concept of Capacity of Care as set forth by the Shelter Veterinarians Association regarding all the above. Maine supposedly follows these guidelines but in practice does not.

Regarding aggressive animals. Maine has strict requirements regarding the sale of aggressive dogs. Those rules are only enforced against pet shops and licensed breeders. In the case of the above referenced shelter, dogs are often returned to the shelter due to aggression and are simply sold to another customer. There is no requirement that dogs be socialized, quarantined, isolated, or otherwise held from sale until their temperament is determined and it is up to the shelter operator to determine which animals are suitable and which aren't. For example, last week 20+ dogs were driven up from Texas, dropped off and listed for sale within 24 hours. There was a situation where one particular dog was sold and returned for aggression 5 times. A veterinarian that treated the animal recommended it be euthanized due to its aggressive behavior. It was simply sold to another family, and the "shelter" keeps the sale price (adoption fee) each time.

While it is clear that there is a demand here in Maine for animals to be adopted, there needs to be more structure and guidance from the state

regarding the operation of “rescues/shelters”. I have focused on dogs here, but it applies to any animal that could potentially end up abandoned and unwanted. I would encourage this committee to develop rules regarding the number of animals that can be cared for by any one individual, shelters must hire staff to provide care. I would urge this committee to address the issue of selling aggressive animals, especially multiple times. There have been people mauled and killed by family pets in the recent past, let’s do what we can to minimize the risk of this happening in the future.

Let’s not forget the human element. Animal Hoarding Disorder is a recognized mental health issue. Many of the shelters are in fact hoarding situations where these individuals address their own mental health needs by hoarding animal, just like junk, food, cars, etc. The rescue referenced earlier currently has 4 40 foot shipping containers full of dog food and continually receive shipments of food donated by manufacturers. When the containers are filled, the food is simply stacked up outside. Needless to say that this leads to issues with rodents and other animals that are attracted to the food. There is also the issue of human/animal cohabitation. Currently the kennel at this rescue is uninhabitable due to many structural and mechanical issues. The owner keeps the dogs in her home. Just picture the squalor in this house. There are photos of the laminate floor peeling apart due to being soaked with dog urine, animal feces in piles on the floor, ripped up furniture, holes in the walls, etc.etc. Since the animals have access to food, water and shelter, this is not covered by Animal Welfare rules.

I would hope that legislation can be enacted to address the following:
Requiring all so called animal rescues/shelters adhere to capacity of care rules

Abolish the separate designation of shelter license and treat all such entities as kennels

Establish animal to human ratios to ensure proper care of all animals

Recognize Animal Hoarding disorder as a mental illness and allow local health officials to intervene as appropriate

Animal rescues are big business, so treat them as such.

Require animal rescues to serve the needs of Maine people first, ironically it is difficult to surrender animals locally because these shelters are full of animals from outside of Maine.

I would be happy to provide information or answer questions of the committee if needed and to be available for a future work session.

Thank you for your time today.

Respectfully,

Charles Shaffer

Sebec, Maine