

TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER
IN SUPPORT OF
L.D. 1771, “An Act to Strengthen Oversight of Kennels by Changing the Licensing Authority from
Municipalities to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry”
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
May 6, 2025

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

My name is Susanna Richer. I live in Portland. Thank you for considering my testimony in support of L.D. 1771.

I am grateful to AWAC for submitting this overdue amendment to Maine’s kennel licensing statute. Why aren't municipal kennels already included under state licensing, given they often have comparable numbers of animals on site to other kennels?

Bringing municipally licensed kennels under the state's existing kennel licensing system would enable uniform licensing, inspections, better tracking and oversight. It may also remove some of the financial and oversight burden from the towns that sometimes do not have the resources to manage these kennels and would facilitate state support on animal welfare issues when needed.

In 2019, I asked the Department for a list of the municipal kennel licenses. I was interested to find out how many of these kennels exist, how many dogs are licensed this way statewide, and how many individuals hold more than one license (indicating more than 10 dogs). The response was that the state does not track these kennels. I am unsure if that has changed.

While I'm not currently associated with any organization, I've spent decades volunteering in animal welfare and rescue. During that time, I received more requests for help regarding municipally licensed kennels than any other type of kennel or shelter. The process of trying to connect complainants with resources revealed that the current licensing structure makes it difficult for the state to step in to support when needed. Additionally, the lack of financial and human resources in smaller towns can make it a challenge to oversee these kennels which can result in small issues turning into large, expensive, animal neglect cases.

Currently, there is an annual license fee of \$42 per municipal kennel. That fee has not been raised for decades, if ever. One license covers up to 10 dogs, but there is no limit on how many municipal (10-dog) licenses one person can hold. Of the \$42.00 fee, \$2.00 goes to the town clerk, \$10.00 to the town animal welfare account and \$30.00 to the State Animal Welfare fund.

Other than a small increase to the licensing fee for some kennels, a decrease for others, and a change as to how those funds are allocated, LD 1771 does not appear to alter the operation of municipal kennels that are complying with existing regulations. However, this proposal allows the state to more easily support a municipality in cases where animal control resources are not available or enough to resolve an issue.

I feel the new licensing fee structure is too low, however if it is a sticking point that prevents this bill from moving forward, perhaps delay any fee changes for a transitional period.

Having these kennels licensed at the state level would make them subject to the Capacity of Care rules that are already in place for breeding kennels, boarding kennels and animal shelters. Below I have included a few examples of municipally licensed kennels that may have benefited from these rules.

- **Norridgewock, Maine. Over 40 outside dogs.**

This situation has resulted in numerous animal welfare and noise complaints over the last decade. The ACO indicated that the kennel operator holds 5 municipal kennel licenses through the town. The kennel owner is a disabled senior who no longer hunts or breeds. The ACO agreed that it will be easy for this situation to turn into a bad one for the dogs and for the town, should something happen to the owner. He has been trying to get the owner to voluntarily reduce dog numbers for years to avoid a situation that would require the town to find placements for all the dogs at once.

- **Somerville, Maine. 36 outside dogs.**

An individual living in a converted shed with no electricity or running water. The resident originally had a only a few dogs. Over 18 months, the individual acquired approximately 36 dogs. The kennel operator started with one municipal kennel license for the location and was issued three additional kennel licenses for as dogs were added to reportedly cover sled dogs and/or livestock guardian dogs. Rabbits in a hutch were the only livestock on site. The neighbors indicated that they never saw the dogs used for sledding. When one of the dogs got sick and required emergency surgery, the dog caretaker did not have the funds for the surgery. Multiply that issue by 36.

If either of these kennels were licensed by the state, the Capacity for Care rules could be applied, giving the state more flexibility to support the towns managing these kennels if needed.

This common-sense organizational change is long overdue and will go a long way to streamlining the licensing and oversight of all kennels in Maine. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susanna Richer
Portland

Sources

Despite concerns as temperatures plummeted last weekend, officials say Norridgewock dogs are fine
<https://www.centralmaine.com/2023/02/08/despite-concerns-as-temperatures-plummeted-last-weekend-officials-say-norridgewock-dogs-are-fine/>