



Teresa S. Pierce
Senator, District 25

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony Introducing LD 595, "An Act to Require Major Substantive Rulemaking for the Companion Animal Sterilization Fund"

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
February 27, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Senator Teresa Pierce and I represent senate district 25 which includes Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, a majority of Yarmouth, Gray, and Long Island. I am here today to introduce LD 595, "An Act to Require Major Substantive Rulemaking for the Companion Animal Sterilization Fund."

As you know, the Companion Animal Sterilization Fund, also known as the Help Fix ME program, is a vital program that provides low-income pet owners with access to affordable spay/neuter services for their companion animals.

The Help Fix ME program has an important impact on our communities. It reduces the number of homeless animals, helps to prevent the spread of disease, and eases the burden on animal shelters and rescues. It also ensures that low-income families can provide necessary care for their pets. With access to affordable spay/neuter services, pet owners can prevent unintended litters and the associated financial strain of caring for additional animals. The Help Fix ME program has been a vital resource for Maine pet owners for over two decades, and we must do all we can to ensure its continued success.

It is important to note that tax dollars do not fund this program. Instead, the program is funded through voluntary tax check-offs and small surcharges on license plates and the licensing of pet food products.

Last year, this committee agreed and voted unanimously to require that an animal welfare group run the program instead of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) due to the Animal Welfare Program's inability to effectively administer the program. As a result, the legislature passed LD 1828, which required the Department to issue RFPs by August 1, 2022, so that a Maine-based animal welfare group could take over the administration of this program.

To date, no RFPs have been issued. Additionally, the Department has proposed new rules that would drastically change the program, adding bureaucratic paperwork and tying the hands of any new administrator to be flexible. The proposed rules make it likely that no Maine-based animal welfare group will qualify to run the program.



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After working with advocates on this issue, we believe that the current rules governing the Help Fix ME program are straightforward and simple and that there is no need for drastic changes. That's why I'm sponsoring LD 595 and asking that the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry oversee any new rules proposed for the program. This committee has already demonstrated its commitment to improving the program through last year's legislation, and we believe that this committee is best suited to ensure that any new rules align with the intent of the original bill.

In conclusion, LD 595 will ensure that the Help Fix ME program is effectively administered and accessible to low-income pet owners throughout the state. I urge you to support this bill and take action to ensure that the program remains a vital resource for pet owners in need.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teresa S. Pierce".

Teresa S. Pierce
State Senator, District 25
*Serving the people of Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth,
Yarmouth (majority), Gray, and Long Island*