

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Cynthia Robbins. I reside in Poland Spring, Maine, and today I represent the Board of Directors of the Poland Spring Preservation Society as Vice President and as the owner of The Poland Spring Resort.

I will speak about the Seppala Siberian Sleddog connection to Poland Spring and Maine.

After the Great Race of Mercy saving the children of Nome, Seppala and some 40 of his dogs toured the lower 48 states. His tour concluded in January 1927 with the dogsled race at Poland Spring, Maine, where he accepted the challenge to race against Arthur Walden, founder of the New England Sled Dog Club and owner of the renowned lead dog, Chinook. Seppala triumphed over the larger, slower dogs driven by Walden and his followers. The enthusiasm for sled dog racing in New England, combined with the publicity from the Serum Run and the victory over Walden, enabled Seppala and partner Elizabeth Ricker whose family owned Poland Spring to establish a Siberian kennel at Poland Spring. This marked the beginning of the spread of the Siberian Husky breed in the United States and Canada. Seppala bred Togo, whose descendants contributed to the "Seppala Siberian Sleddog," a highly sought-after sled dog line.

On September 17, 2022, a bronze statue of Togo was unveiled in Poland Spring, Maine, where Togo spent his final years as a stud dog.

Maine musher Jonathan Hayes of the current Poland Spring Seppala Kennels undertook a 285-mile expedition the previous year with his team of direct descendants of Togo and the team to raise funds for the statue, accompanied by a documentary to raise awareness for the project. At the end of that run on Moosehead Lake I adopted Sawyer, a direct descendent of that famous team, who had become blind. Sawyer is here with me today. The statue, designed by Maine artist David Smus, stands outside the historic Maine State Building on the resort campus.

Today, my friend, Jonathan is driving back from Alaska after completing a journey duplicating the original Serum Run that happened 100 years ago this month.

Last year, we had over 3,000 visitors tour the Maine State Building, visiting our Seppala Togo Collection, our bronze Togo statue, and the Togo Story Book Trail.

In 2011, Time Magazine named Togo, the ancestor of the Seppala Siberian breed, **“the most heroic animal of all time.”** Thirteen states have official state dogs. Our neighbor to the west, New Hampshire, has honored their legacy by designating the Chinook Sled Dog as their official state dog, while Alaska chose the Alaskan Malamute as their state dog.

No other breed of dog can claim the distinction of "Official Maine State Dog" with as much history, honor, and distinction as the Seppala Siberian Sleddog.

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My name is Micheal Feldman. I reside in Poland, Maine, and today I represent myself, the Board of Directors of the Poland Spring Preservation Society. Additionally, my family owned the Poland Spring Resort and Poland Spring Water from 1962 until 1982.

I am here to advocate for the Seppala Siberian Sleddog to be designated as Maine's State Dog. There is a profound connection between these exceptional dogs and the state of Maine.

Northeastern Siberia, a region known for its vast expanses and extreme contrasts, was home to people who greatly valued their sled dogs, as their survival often depended on them. These sled dogs were the ancestors of what we now know as the Seppala Siberian Sleddog, which were imported to Alaska in the early 19th century.

A notable historical event underscores the significance of this breed. On January 27, 1925, Leonhard Seppala and his dog sled team, led by the legendary dog Togo, transported life-saving serum across the harsh, dark, and perilous landscape of Alaska to save the children of Nome from a severe diphtheria outbreak. The existing serum in Nome was insufficient and expired, with potential mortality rates reaching 99.99%.

During the coldest winter in 20 years, dog sleds were the only practical means of delivery. Seppala, with Togo at the lead, was chosen for the most challenging part of the trail. The serum was transported by train to Nenana, where relay teams met in Nulato.

Seppala and Togo mushed 170 miles (270 km) through the most dangerous portion of the trek. Although Balto received most of the fame for completing the last leg of the journey, it was Seppala and Togo who conquered the treacherous terrain.

Maine has a deep connection to this heroic event and boasts a mushing heritage rivaled by few other states. Robert Peary, the first man to reach the North Pole, initiated his expeditions from his home in Maine.

Additionally, Lewiston native Mush Moore famously led a dog team from Fairbanks, Alaska, back to Lewiston, Maine. In the 1930s, rail—and therefore mail—service extended only to the Rangeley Lakes area.

Stations at Bemis and Oquossoc marked the end of the line for travelers and the post. Beyond these stops were two settlements: Grant's settlement at Kennebago and Upper Dam. In warmer months, mail was transported to these outposts by foot or boat, but winter conditions rendered both methods impractical. 2 teams of Dogsleds delivered in the winter months.

Today, the Can-Am Crown International Sled Dog Race in Fort Kent continues to celebrate Maine's rich mushing tradition and significantly impacts the region's economy.

Thank you for considering the adoption of the Seppala Siberian Sleddog as the Maine's State Dog.