

**Monday, February 24, 2025**  
**State and Local Government Committee**  
**Cross Building Room 214**  
**10AM**

**Testimony In Support of LD 80, An Act** An Act to Designate the Seppala Siberian Sleddog as the Maine State Dog

**Respectfully submitted by Rebecca Swanson Conrad, Secretary of the Poland Spring Preservation Society Board of Directors**

Good morning Chairs Senator Baldacci and Representative Salisbury, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Rebecca Swanson Conrad and I live in Auburn. I am the Secretary of the Board of the Poland Spring Preservation Society testifying today in support of LD 80, an Act to Designate the Seppala Siberian Sleddog as the Maine State Dog.

As you know, every state in America has its own official symbols that are recognized by their state legislatures. These symbols serve as cultural touchstones, representing the values and heritage of each state.

We all know our State motto, Dirigo--"I lead" and the pride it instills in our communities. And Moxie, our State drink, Blueberry Pie, our State dessert and Lobster, our State crustacean--all important drivers for Maine's tourism economy. And of course we have the Maine Coon Cat, recognized as the State Cat in 1985.

I would like to focus on adding a Maine State Dog as an education tool for both our youth as well as those across America when learning about Maine. According to State Symbols USA, teachers use State symbols to teach about America's natural, historic, and cultural treasures as a way to understand what makes each state unique.

The Seppala Siberian Sleddog came to Maine following the successful 1925 Great Race of Mercy bringing life saving serum to Nome, Alaska to stem a diphtheria outbreak. When learning about Maine's State Dog, one will learn about history--the history of medicine, transportation, wilderness trekking and problem-solving. One will learn that without any other realistic form of transport, local leaders turned to sled-dogs. And one will learn of Seppelas's dogs, especially Togo, a 12-year old dog credited for leadership, intelligence and ability to sense danger. And following the successful delivery of the serum to Nome, one will learn that Seppela and Togo settled in Poland Spring, Maine at the end of a nationwide tour for Americans to meet the famous musher and his team--apparently dogs were as beloved 100 years ago as they are today. And finally, one will learn

that the Seppala Siberian Sleddog lineage was maintained in its pure form when Leonhard Seppala and Elizabeth Ricker established the first Siberian Kennel in the Lower 48 states at Poland Spring, now owned by Jonathan Hayes in Fort Kent, Maine.

Disney Pictures released *Togo*, an historical adventure film in 2019 and so beloved is Togo that many children who visit Togo's bronze statue at Poland Spring Preservation bring their stuffed Seppala Siberian Sleddog with them. Kids love this dog.

The qualities embodied in the Seppala Siberian Sleddog highly align with Maine's values and heritage. When Maine school children and children and people everywhere learn about Maine through the story of the State Dog they will know the symbol represents Maine's resilient spirit. The Seppala Siberian Sleddog is a fine symbol for Maine--not only for the breed's heroic efforts but also for the entrepreneurial collaboration of Seppala and Ricker to sustain the lineage in Maine.

Thank you.