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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 498

*Resolve, to Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities*

February 27, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Ronda Steciuk, and I am the Director of the Animal Welfare Program at the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am here today to speak neither for nor against LD 498, "*Resolve, to Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities*."

The Animal Welfare Program (AWP) ensures the humane and proper treatment of animals by upholding the animal welfare laws of Maine through communication, education, and enforcement. We do this through developing and implementing policies and programs to address animal cruelty complaints effectively, inspecting and licensing animal shelters, pet stores, kennels, and animal research facilities, and enforcing the licensing of dogs.

LD 498 proposes that DACF adopt rules that set standards for animal rescue entities, including but not limited to dog rescue operations, that specify staff-to-animal ratios and that govern animals that are returned multiple times and resold or placed in multiple homes. DACF believes that enforceable parameters exist in current law and rule that address facilities' "capacity of care," the return of animals to shelters, and their resale. It should also be noted that the scope of the language in this bill could impact other entities regulated by other state agencies, including the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Generally, current laws and regulations already provide that AWP can determine whether an organization cannot keep up with proper caretaking, regardless of the number of staff members working or the number of animals (i.e., the facility's "capacity of care"). For instance, AWP can consider the type and number of animals in the care of the facility, the specific needs of the animals and whether they require special care, the type of operation, the facility operator and staff experience, and more. During an annual inspection or due to a complaint, AWP may enter a shelter/rescue, kennel, or pet shop to examine or conduct

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disease tests.

For substandard conditions, a state veterinarian or licensed veterinarian may issue a quarantine for that facility.

Existing rules also provide AWP with enforceable oversight of shelters, including rescue organizations. For instance, animal sellers and providers must furnish written instructions regarding proper feeding, care, health information, and any special needs of animals upon sale/adoption. 01-001 DACF c. 701(L). The rules also define conditions when an animal is unfit for release for sale/adoption, which includes "animals with aggression that pose a risk to public safety that cannot be safely managed...." 01-001 DACF c. 701(M)(6).

Despite current regulatory and statutory frameworks, AWP understands that some animal rescue entities' lack of compliance is concerning. To help address compliance issues, AWP now has a District Humane Agent dedicated to conducting annual inspections of animal rescue facilities.

Thanks for your attention. I am happy to answer questions now or during the work session.