



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

IN SUPPORT OF LD 528

An Act to Address the Rise in Rabies in Animals by Appointing Certified Rabies Vaccine Administrators

March 13, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Ronda Steciuk, Director of the Animal Welfare Program (AWP) within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am here today to speak in support of LD 528, "*An Act to Address the Rise in Rabies in Animals by Appointing Certified Rabies Vaccine Administrators.*"

This bill seeks to fill a gap in Maine's critical veterinary care. While positive rabies cases have remained steady over the past ten years, rabies is considered endemic in Maine's wildlife population. Vaccinating dogs and cats targets a bridge vector between wild animals and humans, reducing human exposure to rabies. Rabies vaccines are also required in statute.

Currently, only licensed veterinarians can vaccinate Maine animals. Maine's lack of access to veterinary care predates the COVID-19 pandemic. Animal owners in Maine have seen a sharp rise in care costs and a decrease in veterinary capacity. While some pet owners cannot afford care, others cannot find a veterinarian to provide care they could pay for. In more populous areas of the state, animal welfare organizations have worked hard to fill the gap by providing care that ranges from pop-up vaccination days in parks or town halls to full-service, lower-cost veterinary clinics. Many lesser-populated communities in Maine are dealing with true veterinary care deserts.

AWP and our District Humane Agents regularly encounter pet owners who cannot obtain rabies vaccinations for their pets. We are contacted both by owners seeking assistance and by municipal animal control officers who seek guidance when dealing with the conundrum of dog owners being issued summons for lack of licensing and rabies vaccines. A license cannot be issued without a valid rabies vaccine, so when an owner cannot get a vaccine, they cannot get the required license. On one occasion, our Aroostook County District Humane Agent called every veterinary clinic within two hours of the pet owner's home. None offered rabies-only

HARLOW BUILDING
18 ELKINS LANE
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200
FAX: (207) 287-2400
WEB: WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF

appointments; many weren't taking new clients at all. In this situation, the pet owner was already on a waiting list (and had paid \$45 to be on the waiting list) to become a client at one clinic. Clinic staff advised our agent that they could not even estimate when they'd have an opening.

LD 528 would open the door to the most basic protection where providers are severely limited by appointing one or more persons in each county to administer rabies vaccines to animals. This will not completely alleviate barriers, but we believe it is a necessary step in public health and animal welfare for our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer questions now and at the work session.