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

IN OPPOSITION TO LD 1057

*Resolve, to Aid Municipalities, Animal Control Officers, and Other Parties in Complying with  
Electronic Dog Licensing Requirements*

March 25, 2025

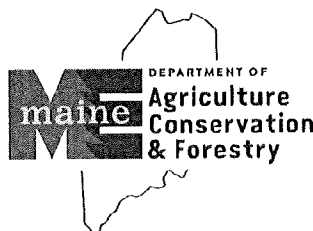
Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Ronda Steciuk, Director of the Animal Welfare Program (AWP) within the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) in opposition to LD 1057, "*Resolve, to Aid Municipalities, Animal Control Officers, and Other Parties in Complying with Electronic Dog Licensing Requirements.*"

AWP would like to clarify the current status and requirements of two applicable but separate statutory provisions in 7 M.R.S Chapter 721 that this bill appears to have conflated. A provision referenced in the LD, §3923-G, "Internet Licensing Project," refers to a system that allows dog owners to purchase licenses online. Offering this service is optional for municipalities; many opt in for the convenience it provides their residents and the time it saves town offices, but it is not compulsory. In this system, dog owners enter their dog's information, which municipalities and the State can then confirm and access.

§3925 "Dog Licensing Database" requires the Department to implement a database that "must track all dog licensing throughout the State and allow municipalities and animal control officers to reunite lost dogs with owners and track" dangerous dogs. This is a system into which, when licensing a dog, a municipality enters information on the animal and—crucially—confirms the animal's rabies vaccination status. §3925 further requires the Department to provide access to this database to all municipalities at no cost. By virtue of its requirement to track all dog licensing throughout the state, §3925 "Dog Licensing Database" is not and cannot be optional for municipal participation. The two statutory mandates of §3925—to create a statewide database and to provide that database free of charge to all municipalities—were and remain unfunded.

Confusion may stem from the fact that the State has selected a single platform, Pet Point, to fulfill the provisions of both §3923-G and §3925. This is a plus because it saves towns the effort

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of manually adding to the database those dogs who have been registered by owners online; the registration information flows directly into the database. But the point remains that the Internet Licensing Project created under §3923-G is an optional program offered for the convenience of towns and dog owners while the Dog Licensing Database created by §3925 is mandatory for the State and all dog licensing agents.

Access to the Maine Dog Licensing Database for towns began rolling out in July 2024. Training materials became available in September, and the database formally became the State's repository for license information in October. Some municipalities asked to postpone adding their registration information to the database because of the increased workload for town clerks surrounding the November election. The Department, the Secretary of State's Office, and the Maine City and Town Clerks Association collaborated on a timeline that allowed towns to delay entering information into the database while ensuring the Department fulfilled its statutory mandates.

Implementing the new system did not go off without hitches; though more than 105,000 2025 licenses have been successfully issued through this system, this off-the-shelf product is not perfectly aligned with every user's preferences. It does successfully and economically meet statutory requirements and provide a functional and useable statewide database. We are aware of more dynamic user support models. The Department of Motor Vehicles, for example, has an adult education consultant who develops curriculum materials and provides regular training for those State and municipal employees who use its database. While this is attractive, funding constraints mean that AWP is limited to those resources offered by our software vendor or that our small staff can develop and provide to our 1,200 users.

That said, we think our complement of training resources is robust. Our website features step-by-step instructions for using the database, and staff are available by phone to those who need extra support. Beyond that, we are currently working with the Maine Town and City Clerk's Association to set up a "Train the Trainers" program to assist users with the database. A mandated software user group would be duplicative, and the goal and duration of the suggested group are unclear.

Even with its imperfections, the Maine Dog Licensing Database has proven its value in just a few short months. It has uncovered, for example, 24 municipalities that have not submitted a monthly report or paid the State's portion of licensing fees in over a year. Most importantly, it is helping us ensure compliance with mandated rabies vaccination—the public health reason that dog licensing exists.

AWP is interested in ensuring municipalities and their ACOs actively use the database and that the use is not delayed by the provisions of LD 1057. Per M.R.S. Chapter 719 §3913(2-A), the Department is responsible for reimbursing shelters \$4 per day for every stray animal that comes in. It is in our financial interest for animals to go home, not to shelters. Utilizing the database to license dogs and conduct ACO lookups will reduce stray impounds. The platform also provides access to microchip lookup and owner notification for any animal registered to the platform, the largest microchip registry in North America, regardless of whether the animal is licensed in Maine.

I'm happy to answer questions now and at the work session.