

*Leslie*

**RE: LD 962 – An Act to Establish the Offence of Aggravated Operating Under the Influence Resulting in the Death of a Pet**

To the Honorable Travis Hasenfus and the members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, thank you for allowing LD 962 to receive a public hearing in hopes of bringing this bill to the 132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature.

I stand before you to give testimony on a bill that is near and dear to my heart. On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, my wife Sari, my dog Kiska, and I were on route to Portland when we were stopped in construction at exit 113 of I-95. A one-ton pickup truck being operated at highway speed slammed into our vehicle which was at the end of the line. In front of us were three other automobiles and at the head of the line were three motorcycles. According to the accident report, the damage to the vehicles was such that all vehicles had to be towed from the accident scene. The impact of the truck on our vehicle killed my wife and my dog, broke my back and resulted in two subdural hematomas. I suffer from positional dizziness to this day.

Today you will hear testimony as to the terrible emotional toll of losing a pet in an accident such as this and I concur with their narratives. Until you have experienced it, you can't even begin to imagine the mental anguish you experience. Your beloved pet died violently, alone, and you never got a chance to comfort them or say goodbye.

My testimony is a departure from the emotional side of tragedies that I, Lisa, and countless others have endured. I am sure that those of you who have adopted a pet can and do relate to these testimonies but for those who don't, I'm going to be really crass here and boil it down to the lowest possible denominator, money, something that even the most callous and uninterested can understand and relate to.

I'm one of those who saves just about everything in a file related to my pets. When I took out Kiska's file and added up all the receipts related to her care it came to a grand total of \$17,788.20 for her care and comfort over her 18 years of life on this planet. Let that sink in for a while. To break it down, that works out to be \$988.33 per year. Mind you, these figures excludes food, leashes, collars, toys, and any other day to day sundry expenses so these numbers are a fraction of the total cost.

Given this, a pet, absent the emotional viewpoint, is a significant investment. In an accident caused by a driver operating under the influence, they can be held liable for damages to mere possessions. Inanimate objects that can be replaced. And yet, the loss of a living, breathing being is legally cast aside like yesterdays newspaper, a being that the owner has poured their heart and soul into their care and comfort. And, please, don't think of this as an attempt to anthropomorphize a pet. I think we can all agree that is a specious argument.

Ladies and gentleman, Senators and Representatives, I urge you in the strongest possible terms to approve this bill and to actively shepherd it through the legislative process to bring it to fruition, both the criminal penalties and restitution. While nothing on God's green Earth can even come close to replacing a beloved pet, this bill does at the very least takes a giant step to bring some sense of solace to a pet owner who has had their cherished companion ripped from their life and to add to the closure of a tragic event.

Thank you for your time. I will remain for any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Leslie M. Ohmart III