

In response to proposed Bill LD 1771
Kennel Licensing

My name is Fawn Richardson but I am better known as Tarma Shena.

I am the author of several books and numerous articles in farming publications across the country. I am a dog trainer, a farmer, a daughter, sometimes a comedian, and longtime resident of Maine.

I was not born here, my parents moved here when I was five and my childhood memories and the culture I grew up in are all rooted in this great state. After living in several others as an adult I returned there, I love the land and I love Maine.

I am also the owner of Farei Kennels. We use our farm to research and educate on best practices for using Livestock Guardian Dogs in today's modern farming framework. We run an online training program designed to educate dog owners on utilizing LGDs on their farm. We also focus on how to be responsible dog owners for all breeds, keeping more dogs in their homes and out of the shelter system. We are by far, the most inexpensive training program in the nation.

Livestock Guardian Dogs, also known as LGDs are a group of breeds developed over thousands of years, to guard livestock. They are intelligent, independent dogs who are uniquely suited to this special role of livestock protection. Considered non-lethal predator management, this means that I can live and farm beside local wildlife without harming them. LGDs have been used in conservation projects all over the world where humans and farming come into conflict with local predators. They have saved cheetahs in Africa, penguins in Australia, and they save domesticated livestock every day on farms and ranches across America.

One of those best practices is having multiple dogs. No dog should be asked to work twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. Dogs need rest, companionship, and the ability to retire when their faithful service is completed.

Let me give you an idea of what that looks like on my farm. Maine is a very rural state and where I am located is no different. I live in an area with little human habitation. Our off grid farm has hundreds of miles of paper company land behind us stretching all the way to Canada. In the front is the Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, eleven thousand acres of protected wildlife habitat separated from me by only a rough dirt road.

I have twenty acres comprised of silvopasture and wooded forage areas, raising Jacob sheep, African geese, chickens, muscovys, and guineas. We also seasonally raise pigs and have a dairy cow. We grow a lot of our own food and I am eternally grateful to live in a "right to farm" state. We should also have a right to protect that farm.

We currently contend with raccoons, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, fisher, weasels, bears, hawks, owls, and bald eagles. As well as stray dogs and, unfortunately, the occasional two legged predator.

To that end I raise, work, train, and occasionally breed what you would call Anatolians. A livestock guardian dog breed originating in what is modern day Turkey and archeological evidence dates their development as starting somewhere between seven and ten thousand years ago. These dogs are not a recent fad although ten years ago they were unheard of here in Maine. However, as farming practices increase so does our need to do so in the best way possible. That includes learning how to do so without coming into conflict with local wildlife.

Your "licensing program" for kennels has always been about how many dogs a person has. It isn't even about breeding, which should be based on merit and best practices for the individual breed involved, not the number of dogs you have. The more you penalize people for animal ownership, the more likely they are to change their animal husbandry practices to meet state requirements and not always in a positive way.

I ask for your indulgence as I take a moment to describe what the group of working canines on my farm looks like and how your rules could potentially change that.

Bridger will be eleven years old this summer. She has had two litters in her lifetime, is still intact and spends most of her time next to the woodstove. She does not work.

Tanaka is seven years old. She has had two litters in her lifetime and is semi-retired. She is also still intact.

Sakura is also seven years old. She has had one litter in her lifetime, she works together with Tanka to make a full time dog. She is still intact.

Punica is five years old. She has never had a litter, is spayed and I took her back from a customer having problems at two years old. Because that is what responsible dog breeders do. They keep their dogs from entering the shelter system. She will have a home here for the rest of her life.

Reina is four years old, works full time, is intact, and has never had a litter.

Uruk is four this year, he is intact and has created one litter. He works full time.

Lira is four years old, works full time and is currently pregnant with her second, and last litter. She was my only litter last year and will be my only litter this year. She works full time when she isn't on maternity leave.

Oda is three years old, is intact and has made two litters. He works full time.

Elora is three years old, she is intact, has never been bred and works full time.

Taika is nine months old. Obviously she has never been bred and is still intact, although none of your documentation defines what constitutes "breeding age". By any reasonable standards she is not. She is still in training and her work schedule is very limited at this age. Industry standard for working LGDs, especially in environments with poultry, is two years of age.

Koyu is almost five months old, she is obviously intact and does not work at all. Puppies do not work, they ARE work.

Because of your lack of definitions I have seven livestock guardian dogs who are "of breeding age", if you go by responsible breeding practices I have one, Elora. She is mentally, emotionally, and physically mature and has passed all of her health testing.

Any farm who chooses to use LGDs to keep their animals safe is going to run into the same problem. It is also recommended best practice to stagger them in age. That means that even for a small farm who might only have two working dogs, they will also have retirees and pups in training.

But this is a working farm, I also have a three year old working English Shepherd, a herding dog breed developed for its "living fence" herding style much like other "shepherd" breeds. She helps us move sheep through our rotational grazing cycle and is a house pet when we pull back for the winter. She is intact and has never had a litter. I do not breed English Shepherds.

I have an eighteen month old Cairn Terrier, she hunts rats, mice, and other pests around the farm. She is intact and never had a litter. I do not breed Cairn Terriers.

Lastly, I have a three year old Shih Tzu. Her sole purpose in life is to look cute and judge us all for our shortcomings. She is intact and has never had a litter. I do not breed Shih Tzus.

At this point I am up to ten "breeding dogs". My only hope is that Bridger dies before Koyu reaches this mysterious breeding age. And this is an issue for other farms who have herders and pets as well as their working dogs. They are not "breeding kennels" and they are not "kennels" at all, they are simply farms trying to protect the animals they raise in an environmentally friendly way. In most states LGDs are classified as livestock, not pets. They have the same rules and animal husbandry requirements as the stock they defend.

I have been lucky, my ACO not only understands what LGDs are, but uses one on her own small farm. Many are not so lucky and many ACOs are doing the best job they can with the limited experience they have. They do not understand why this dog chooses to lay out in the weather, they don't understand that he has been provided with a ten by forty barn, a four by sixteen creep, and a dog house and simply chooses to lay on the top of the snowbank and watch over his animals. He is not cold. He is not wet. He certainly does not care that the state bureaucrat in a suit standing at my farm gate thinks dogs belong on a couch.

Yet you want more state regulations brought on these farms. Leaving farmers to make choices. Spaying a dog of that size costs twelve hundred dollars at my veterinary office. The responsible dog ownership I have described above is free, and for small farms, every dime counts. So where does that leave them?

Instead of snoozing on the porch in the sun or working part time, Bridger, Sakura, and Tanaka face either entering the shelter system or being euthanized to reduce the number of dogs I have.

The kennel licensing you have enacted has never had an effect on the irresponsible breeding practices that go on. I have been immersed in the LGD world for a decade here in Maine and watched it do great things. I have also watched it do not so great things. Most of the irresponsible breeding are people with two or three dogs. The unlicensed owners you allow to have one litter a year for free. This legislation isn't about what's best for dogs, like many other social problems or our times, you are penalizing the people who do it right, not the ones who cause the problems.

If you were really interested in what was best for dogs you would be pushing for education for ACOs, something we have tried to get you to do, and judging "kennels" and "breeders" based on the merit of their practices and not how many dogs they have.