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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

In Support of LD 1771

*An Act to Strengthen Oversight of Kennels by Changing the Licensing Authority from  
Municipalities to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry*

May 6, 2023

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Ronda Steciuk, the Director of the Animal Welfare Program (AWP) at the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am here today to speak in support of LD 1771, *An Act to Strengthen Oversight of Kennels by Changing the Licensing Authority from Municipalities to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry*.

First, I want to clarify the current kennel licensing framework in Maine. There are two distinct provisions: Title 7, Chapter 723 Facility Licensing, which covers Breeding Kennels, Boarding Kennels, Animal Shelters, and Pet Shops under DACF oversight; and Chapter 721 Dog Licensing, which addresses municipal kennel licenses for facilities with five or more dogs used for breeding, hunting, shows, and other purposes.

A key difference between these provisions is inspection authority. Currently, DACF can inspect Chapter 723 facilities. However, Chapter 721 municipal kennels can only be inspected by local animal control officers (ACOs).

This inspection limitation has created significant challenges. While many ACOs effectively handle kennel oversight, 44 municipalities currently lack appointed ACOs. Our program regularly receives complaints about municipal kennels where towns have limited or no animal control capacity. Issues range from noise complaints to loose animals and facility conditions; however, AWP's humane agents cannot legally inspect these premises even when serious rule violations are alleged.

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Since October, users of the new statewide database have issued municipal kennel licenses to 132 individuals across 76 municipalities. We do not know how many have been issued by those not yet participating in the database program.

DACF strongly supports LD 1771 as it would address this gap in oversight and ensure licensed facilities are meeting appropriate standards. However, we request two amendments: 1) Municipalities without ACOs should be required to pay for state inspections rather than receiving them at AWP's expense, and 2) License applicants, not AWP, should bear the cost of background checks under §3935. These changes would ensure appropriate oversight while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

I am happy to answer questions now or at the work session.