

OFFICE OF POLICY AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

To: Members, Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
From: Karen S. Nadeau, Legislative Analyst
Date: March 23, 2021
Subj: **LD 561** Resolve, To Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities

This resolve requires the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to adopt rules that set standards for animal rescue entities, including but not limited to rescue dog operations, that specify staff-to-animal ratios and that govern animals that are returned multiple times and resold or placed in multiple homes.

Proponents: *Resident of Sebec; Maine Veterinary Medical Association; American Kennel Club*
Written only: Federation of Maine Dog Clubs and Responsible Dog Owners

- LD was submitted in response to a complaint from a rescue operation with over 50 dogs and the inability to provide adequate care and where a vicious dog was sold and returned three or four times.
- Staff-to-animal ratios and other operational regulations ensure the safety and welfare of the animals under the care of these entities.
- The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) is particularly well suited to advise the Department on the creation of regulations and standards for animal rescue entities. This group has been unable to meet since 2019 and is still awaiting confirmation of several members; AWAC should be reinstated as soon as possible to assist in creating these standards.
- Three states now issue “Hoarding Disorder Awareness Week” proclamations to increase public awareness regarding this illness (MA, WA, MN). If Maine were to adopt a similar proclamation, it might help communities recognize other areas in the state with the same challenges...
- CA created a new law in 2019, which requires animal shelters or rescue groups to provide information on the circumstances of each bite resulting in a skin break; person buying or adopting the dog needs to sign a paper acknowledging they know about the dog’s history.

Opponents: *None*

NFNA: *Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Animal Welfare Program (AWP); Maine Federation of Humane Societies*

- LD is well-intentioned, but extremely complicated and may prove too ambitious to accomplish in a fair, consistent manner that would apply to all licensed facilities.
- AWP works hard to ensure the humane treatment of animals through communication, education and enforcement of animal welfare laws and currently has an inspection that animal shelters must pass to operate.
- Capacity for Care concept (C4C) has been discussed nationally for a few years; AWP has discussed how to incorporate C4C into our practices and all 545 facilities that AWP regulates.
- It is already in rule that the adoption of any animal with aggression issues that poses a risk to public safety or cannot be safely managed through a behavioral training program is prohibited.
- Maine rule governing animal welfare (chapter 701) and the sale of dogs and cates and importation of dogs and cates for resale or adoption (chapter 216) cover animal health requirements, housing standards, disease control, record keeping, breeding kennels and pet shops.
- Rule chapters should be reviewed and updated, but directing rulemaking at this time is premature.
- It is unfortunate that AWAC has not met since May 16, 2019 due to vacancies.