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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
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Neither For Nor Against LD 561

Resolve, To Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities

March 9, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Committee, I am Liam Hughes. I am the Director of the Animal Welfare Program (AWP) in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am here today to speak in opposition to LD 561, "*Resolve, To Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities.*"

The AWP works hard to ensure the humane treatment of animals through communication, education, and enforcement of animal welfare laws. LD 561 proposes that the Department adopt rules that set standards for animal rescue entities, including but not limited to rescue dog operations, that specify staff-to-animal ratios. These standards are sometimes known as "capacity for care" standards. The bill would also require the Department to create a system to track animal adoption returns. These concepts are well-intentioned but extremely complicated and may prove too ambitious to accomplish in a fair, consistent manner that would apply to all licensed facilities. Additionally, the AWP currently has an inspection form that animal shelters must pass to operate.

The Capacity for Care concept (C4C) has been discussed nationally for a few years. The AWP has also discussed how to incorporate this theory into our practices for all of the facilities that we regulate. However, several important factors are recognized when trying to take a theory like C4C and put it into practice among the 545 Maine facilities that AWP regulates. This standard would be applied to all facilities including animal shelters, animal rescues, pet stores, breeding kennels, boarding kennels, and research facilities.

There is no one easily applied C4C formula because these facilities operate in diverse ways and they have different objectives and missions. To determine the appropriate C4C, factors such as housing, workflow, length of stay, and sanitation, plus other tasks like spaying and neutering, medical treatments, and animal behavior assessments, need to be established in each facility. No two animal facilities operate precisely alike due to variations in construction, mission, geography, population served, and services offered, making this a complex issue that needs a lot

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of work and discussion to develop standards that can be appropriately regulated and enforced. Most of the current research and models currently being studied only applies to traditional brick and mortar animal shelters, not to rescues and other animal facility types.

Next, adoption returns are not clearly defined legally or within the animal sheltering world. At most animal shelters, it is loosely defined as an animal who had been “intaked” into the shelter previously. But that only extends to that particular animal shelter and its knowledge and experience with that animal. With 141 Animal Shelters and Animal Rescues across the state, all of whom utilize different software or internal paperwork, animal information does not extend beyond the adopter that takes the animal home. And there could be many reasons why that adoption did not work out, such as the adopting individual’s expectations not matching the reality of the situation with potential unexpected costs, medical or behavior issues, or other scenarios. With the current high demand for pets and the multiple ways to acquire pets from within Maine or out-of-state shelters, rescues, breeders, or pet stores, it would be challenging to track every individual animal adoption or sale throughout an animal’s life span. It is important to note that it is already in rule that the adoption of any animal with aggression issues that pose a risk to public safety or cannot be safely managed through behavioral training programs is prohibited.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer your questions now or at the work session.