



March 9, 2021

RE: Testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 561 – Resolve, To Improve Standards for Animal Rescue Entities

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Katie Lisnik and I am the Executive Director the Greater Androscoggin Humane Society in Lewiston and a board member of the Maine Federation of Humane Societies (MFHS). I am presenting testimony neither for nor against LD 561 on behalf of MFHS, a collaborative statewide network of humane organizations working to support animal welfare groups, promote the adoption of homeless animals and responsible pet ownership, and to end pet overpopulation and animal cruelty through education, outreach, and advocacy. Our mission is to provide resources and opportunities, dedicated to promoting and advancing the humane care of all animals throughout the state of Maine.

Maine law currently includes [Rule Chapters for the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry](#) governing animal welfare (Chapter 701) and governing the sale of dogs and cats and importation of dogs and cats for resale or adoption (Chapter 216). They cover animal health requirements, housing standards, disease control, record keeping, and much more, providing guidance for not just animal shelters and rescues, but also kennels, breeding kennels, and pet shops. These rule chapters should be reviewed and updated, but we feel directing rulemaking at this time may be premature.

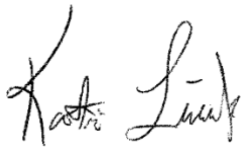
Successful reform can be achieved when all stakeholders come to the table to discuss concerns and find meaningful solutions. When representatives from across the animal welfare community come together and evaluate the existing laws and rules, issues, available data, and resources, they can generate recommendations that dramatically challenge the status quo and push the envelope in terms of sheltering expectations and approaches to increase lifesaving. We recommend that a stakeholder group conduct such an evaluation and recommend language best aimed at elevating sheltering and rescue operations in the state.

We are fortunate to already have such a stakeholder group in Maine tasked with such work as the duties of the Animal Welfare Advisory Council (AWAC) include: “A. Review and advise the commissioner on proposed revisions to the animal welfare laws and rules; B. Assist the commissioner in the continuing implementation and evaluation of the animal welfare laws and rules.” ([Title 7, section 3906-C, subsections 7A-B](#)) However, it is unfortunate that AWAC has not met since May 16, 2019 due to vacancies. Despite numerous qualified applications being submitted for consideration, the licensed animal shelter seat has been vacant since late 2016. AWAC has demonstrated that when there is full membership and engagement it can provide the framework and platform for the discussions and collaborative work needed to provide guidance and recommendations on animal welfare reform such as was done on the dangerous dog laws a few years ago. It is imperative that AWAC seats be filled so it can move forward on work such as a review of Chapters 701 and 216, and we would welcome any help this committee may be able to offer in making that happen.

Additionally, LD 561 asks that certain types of rules be promulgated which, while well intended, could prove problematic. For example, specific staff to animal ratios cannot be set broadly across all organizations as there are many factors that go into determining capacity for care including “the number of appropriate housing units; staffing for programs or services; staff training; average length of stay; and the total number of reclaims, adoptions, transfers, release, or other outcomes.” ([Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#), 2010 at p. 12)

MFHS provides a ready body of engaged experts willing to participate in the stakeholder process through AWAC or another review body. We thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katie Lisnik". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K" and "L".

Katie Lisnik  
Board Member  
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