

Robert Fisk, Jr.
Maine Friends of Animals
LD 595

TESTIMONY OF ROBERT FISK, JR.
Founder and President of Maine Friends of Animals

IN SUPPORT of LD 595 "An Act to Require Major Substantive Rulemaking for the
Companion Animal Sterilization Fund"

Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
February 27, 2023

Good morning Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Pluecker and members of the committee. My name is Robert Fisk, Jr. I am the founder and president of Maine Friends of Animals, championing animal protection in Maine's for over 25 years. Given others will address the Animal Welfare Program's proposed changes to the state's Help Fix Me (HFM), as well as those being proposed by the bill's proponents, and as a former state legislator, I will focus my testimony on the process.

Unfortunately, the administration of the HFM fund by the Animal Welfare Program (AWP) has had some on-going challenges. In an effort to address these continuing problems, last year this Committee passed legislation (LD 1828), requiring the Department's Commissioner to "contract for the administration of the Companion Animal Sterilization Fund". Yet a year after its enactment nothing has been done to implement the directive of LD 1828.

Instead, the AWP has proposed substantive changes to the program's procedures, changes which were not intended in that legislation. Moreover, the AWP established criteria that made it impossible for anyone to feasibly bid on the contract, hence, apparently as intended, the program would fall back under the AWP. Without consent or input of the stakeholders or the legislators, the Department is manipulating the process to keep the program in-house, the opposite of the intent of LD 1828.

Why hasn't an RFP for the contract been executed that was suppose to have been done no later than August 1, 2022? While instead the AWP proposed changes to "transform the overall structure and design" of the program. That was not the intent of the LD 1828. Rather than finding ways to implement the contracting out of the HFM program, the Department set up roadblocks to impede it.

In the last legislature, this Committee heard testimony from stakeholders and voted unanimously to pass LD 1828. The committee deserves to know why it has not been implemented. If the Department is doing something otherwise, then they need to be more transparent and inclusive, and craft an alternative that stakeholders and legislators find more acceptable than what they passed just a year ago.

I hope the Committee will use LD 595 to consider the proponent's rules changes and/or re-enforce the intent of LD 1828. I strongly urge the committee to vote "Ought to pass" on LD 595. I would be happy to answer any questions.