

Testimony from Esther Mechler, Brunswick, founder of SPAY/USA and the United Spay Alliance

- Our mission has been to end the births of unwanted litters of cats and dogs, and to make the spay surgery available and affordable to low-income people across the country.
- In or around 2003, we worked with Susan Hall and Sharon Secovich, who set up an excellent program here in Maine that assisted low-income pet owners with the cost of spaying/neutering – the **Help Fix ME** program...
- The program relies on participating veterinarians, who graciously discount their surgery prices to help us stretch our dollars. We are in the midst of a nationwide vet shortage, so it is imperative that the program is easy for them to join and administer.
- Other states have also set up public programs to address pet overpopulation. In fact, New Hampshire's program has resulted in shelters across the state taking in fewer animals.
- One of the best state programs is called Pet Friendly Services of Indiana; it is a voucher program that covers the entire state of Indiana – a population of six million people. The organization is top rated and serves as a model to other states.
- Cheri Storms, the Director of the program and Scarlett Cmiel, Operations Manager, have offered to help Maine to create a very efficient voucher system which they have used for several years now. They have offered to do this free of charge.
- The Indiana program makes it possible for them to **track funding from its source to each end-of-month tally, track vouchers from application to the date of surgery, ensure that vets are paid in a timely fashion after they have done the surgery, keep statistics to know how well the program is doing, and provide an accurate report to the administration each month and at year end.** The program is also simple for vets to join and to submit invoices.
- A number of us who have worked with other statewide programs wish to see the **Help Fix ME program** have exceptional results.

In fact, the problem with Help Fix ME in the past ten years was not the rules and regs but the fact that the phone was hardly ever answered, that no one was maintaining communication with the veterinarians, and there was no way for vouchers to be obtained quickly and tracked. A good administrator and a tested computer program would address those problems without all the rule changes. We could have an efficient and effective program with minimal staff and the transparency that has been lacking these past ten years.

As written, the 'new' rules may do more harm than good:

- Basically, they create more paperwork,
 - reduce flexibility,
 - reduce transparency,
 - make it more difficult to track and produce reports,
 - and unfortunately make it more likely that vets will not want to sign up.
- We propose that we work in the coming weeks with the sister program in Indiana and come up with a simple model tailored to Maine's needs. We invite you to work with us to create a model program here in Maine and to best serve our citizens.