

**TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER**  
**IN OPPOSITION TO L.D. 644 " An Act to Include Cats in the Laws Governing Animal Trespass"**  
**Committee On Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**  
**February 27, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony in opposition to L.D. 644 " An Act to Include Cats in the Laws Governing Animal Trespass."

There is no question that free-roaming cats present a threat to our already struggling bird and wildlife populations. However, amending the animal trespass statute to include cats will not resolve this issue and it may result in a wide array of unintended and costly consequences.

As a cat parent and wildlife advocate, I strongly believe that domesticated / owned cats should be kept indoors and / or secured (on [leash](#) or in a "[Catio](#)") when outdoors to keep both the cats and wildlife safe. In addition to the threat presented to wildlife, free-roaming cats are at risk of being lost, hit by cars, attacked by dogs or wild animals, and are of increased danger of death by poison, disease, and exposure. However, Maine has quite a few felines that cannot be classified as "owned" in the traditional sense, and the welfare of these cats must be considered when proposing changes to the animal trespass statute.

Cats are currently excluded from the animal trespass law for a reason. The financial and human resources required to enforce the existing animal trespass law already present a struggle for many of the smaller, more rural municipalities in Maine. Adding the management of free-roaming cats to the enforcement to-do list will place an unfair burden on animal control officers and the town budgets, not to mention the impact such a change could have on animal shelters.

Additionally, as others will no doubt mention, passing L.D. 644 could have negative consequences for the feral and community cat populations and their caretakers. Removing cats from feral colonies to enforce an animal trespass law will not provide an effective solution to the problem this bill tries to address and will label caring individuals, who are trying to help abandoned cats in their communities, as lawbreakers.

More appropriate and effective solutions to the challenges created by free roaming cats include:

1) Implementing a state-sponsored Trap-Neuter-Release program staffed with trained volunteers. TNR is the only proven long lasting approach to reduce free roaming / feral cat colony numbers and should be a priority of the Animal Welfare Program.

2) In partnership with local shelters, rescues and TNR groups, AWP should create an outreach program to educate the public about the benefits of early feline spay/neutering, of keeping cats inside and of ways to allow cats to safely enjoy the outdoors without being allowed to free-roam. For example, holding online workshops to teach cat owners how to build a secure outdoor enclosure ([Catio](#)) for their cats to enjoy would be a fun and proactive way for the state to connect with and educate the public on this issue.

All animals deserve protection. However, this initiative will do little to protect birds from cats, will place Maine's free roaming cats and their caretakers at risk and place undue burden on the municipalities charged with enforcement of the animal trespass law. Please vote "Ought not to pass."

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susanna Richer - Portland, ME

DIY Catio Plans: <https://catiospaces.com/catios-cat-enclosures/diy-plans/>