

Ollie's Law Advisory Committee Meeting
Minutes December 17th, 2025 | 9 AM – 10:30 AM
Approved 1.6.26

Advisory Committee Attendance

Mike Cahill
Louis Pacheco
Jeni Mather
Carmen Rustenbeck
Dr. Erin Doyle
Francine Coughlin
Debra Cameron
Kara Holmquist
Katherine MacKenzie
Mark Hogan
Amy Baxter
Noelle Wilson

Advisory Committee Absence

Kevin Sullivan-absent for
meeting

MDAR Attendees

Katherine Foote
Sheri Gustafson

Public Attendees

20 additional ZOOM attendees

This open meeting was held virtually over the ZOOM webinar platform. 884 1790 8588 Meeting
ID: Passcode: animal

Agenda with Minutes

I. Attendance

•Advisory Committee Roll Call

Mather took roll call. Cahill present, Pacheco present, Cameron present, Doyle present, Coughlin present, Holmquist present, Mackenzie present, Hogan present, Baxter present, Wilson present. Rustenbeck present.

Sullivan absent.

II. Approval of Minutes

•Review and approval of minutes from November 18, 2025 (vote required)

Mather asked that PACE be corrected to PACC in the minutes. Cahill approved, Pacheco approved, Cameron approved, Doyle approved, Coughlin approved, Rustenbeck approved, MacKenzie approved, Holmquist approved. Hogan, Wilson, Baxter absent at last meeting.

III. File of Bill

•Kara to provide an explanation and updates on HD5356: An Act Related to the Enforcement of Chapter 140

•Review attached bill and summary sheet outlining core changes

Holmquist shared that a bill, HB4849, has been filed to address and enhance Ollie's Law. Some of the highlights were: it would allow dogs to go without tags in kennel settings when other acceptable ID methods are used, and it would create kennel reporting and enforcement actions.

Mather asked whether the bill summary document could be shared on the screen, as the public is requesting minutes and documents.

Holmquist shared the HB4849 Summary Document and stated that since it was a late-file, it's currently unclear whether it will have a full hearing. Holmquist continued reviewing some of the items in the summary document. The bill would help support additional funding sources for the Mass Animal Fund.

Pacheco asked for clarification on where to find the bill's language. Holmquist answered that to find it on the MA legislature page, make sure you filter by the current session.

Mather restated that the bill would allow options for canine ID in kennels instead of tags on collars, and clarified that, for this bill to go through, it needs support. Mather asked Cahill for comments on the bill.

Cahill replied that he cannot comment on pending legislation.

Cameron asked whether there was anything in the bill that would require a public list of licensed kennels to be posted.

Cahill responded that there is currently no requirement for posting a licensed kennel list. The only requirement is that MDAR post a list of enforcement actions if it is involved in a kennel investigation.

Holmquist shared an Ollie's Law Strike Out document with comments.

Baxter stated that in Ollie's case, the kennel's license was revoked by the municipality and that this type of information is important for the public to have access to. She further stated that it would be a significant deficiency under Ollie's Law if kennel and licensing issues were not shared.

Cameron asked if the public could see the MDAR kennel list and felt that access to it would be an important piece of consumer protection. She also asked whether, if they can't, it's something the regulations could require.

Cahill stated that, under the regulations, they could require that a current kennel license be displayed at the kennel, and he could tell the department that the suggestion to display a list online has been made.

Mather stated that she felt licensing is something that can be stated in a disclosure statement. Baxter said she felt it was a reasonable ask for the towns to post a list of licensed kennels so consumers can check.

Cameron said that one issue may be the lack of a universal licensing system for posting information.

Cahill commented that while that is true, there is typically a physical license issued by municipalities to kennels. That piece of paper should be posted somewhere.

Holmquist asked whether there was a possibility of creating a database that the department could post.

Cahill said that it is not his decision to make, but he could relay the question to the department.

Holmquist asked if each municipality even has a website.

Hogan commented that he didn't think it would be difficult for municipalities to post. Since each municipality has a different licensing system in place, it wouldn't create a list that could be easily navigated on a larger scale.

Mather said that she could add the bill back to a future agenda so that the discussion can continue.

IV. Meeting Schedule

•Review upcoming meeting dates and overall timeline

Mather asked to move on to the proposed meeting schedule. She stated that Gustafson reminded her that a meeting is not set until the department receives an agenda and the meeting is posted on the website. She stated that she prefers to keep the proposed meeting schedule as is and to cancel meetings, if necessary, since it would be easier to cancel than to add. She asked Holmquist to list the next few proposed meeting dates.

Holmquist shared that the next proposed meeting dates were: 1/6, 1/21, 2/10, 2/26, and 3/31.

•Discuss results of the initial poll

Mather stated that she was reviewing past meeting minutes and documents to see if any topics need to be revisited. She read through the subject ratings from the initial poll to the AC. Mather said the topic she felt might need revisiting to ensure everyone's opinion was captured was staffing ratios and supervision.

Cameron asked whether age restrictions need to be placed on comingled groups.

Cahill said that age restrictions would be hard to enforce because age is hard to visually determine.

Pacheco commented that he has a kennel that serves both as a boarding kennel and a home-based breeding kennel, and that he felt the inspection of home-based breeding kennels should be discussed.

Cahill asked how often the breeding dogs are comingled with the boarding dogs.

Pacheco commented that sometimes the adult breeding dogs are kept in the kennel with the boarders, and that while his kennel has been inspected by the ACO, his home, where the rest of the breeding dogs are kept, has not.

Cahill commented that Ollie's Law has not changed the requirement that the areas of the kennel that house animals need to be inspected, so if he keeps some of the animals in his home, that area should be inspected as well.

MacKenzie said that when she conducts inspections, she looks at all areas where the dogs live, including homes, and has never received any pushback.

Cameron asked if the recommended staff ratios even apply to training kennels that take a litter of puppies.

Mather said that if more than 4 dogs are comingled, 2 staff members need to be supervising. If they aren't comingled, then 1 staff member is needed for up to 15 dogs.

Coughlin said she has a puppy program, but the dogs are not comingled, and she feels that staffing ratios should not have exemptions for age. Coughlin expressed concern that if supervision is not properly defined, then 1 staff member could end up overseeing a playgroup of 45 dogs.

Cahill said that there is a difference between staff and supervision. Supervision is defined as direct supervision, so a group of 45 dogs would need to have 3 people available in the area. On-premises ratios only count when dogs are kept separate from each other.

Mather said that she suggested not allowing a playgroup of more than 45 dogs.

Mike said that he remembers the cap being at 60 dogs.

Mather said that she believed they started at 60 and reduced. She also stated that she didn't want to set unfair limits on organizations that had adequate safety resources.

Holmquist shared a document that showed the results of the topics poll.

Mather said she felt the playgroup discussion landed on 60 dogs as a maximum.

Coughlin said that she didn't feel comfortable setting a playgroup size if the supervision ratio is being met. She suggested considering square footage.

Rustenbeck said they have minimum square-footage requirements in their documents. She also said that she felt training was an important topic to revisit.

Mather said the industry standard is 75 square feet per dog, but exemptions could be granted based on dog size.

Rustenbeck asked whether there were any square-footage requirements in Massachusetts, and, if not, she felt it would be important to state a standard. She also wanted to revisit the topic of comingled puppies.

Doyle said she strongly felt that puppy comingling is an important part of socialization.

Mather said that the group needed to consider infectious disease risk.

Cameron asked whether a trainer could split a group of puppies into two groups of 4 to keep the ratio lower.

Mather stated that breeder kennels were initially included in the bills, but were removed in the final versions.

Cameron said that she felt square footage requirements should be in the regulations for safety reasons.

Cahill said that ACOs determine the maximum number of animals that can be housed at a kennel during their inspection.

Pacheco asked how the maximum number is determined and whether it is based on anything.

Cahill stated that the ACO assesses the space and determines a safe limit.

Mather brought the conversation back to the topic poll and asked whether the ACOs have what they need to enforce.

MacKenzie stated that as an ACO, she felt the topics had been covered.

V. Advisory Committee Input

- Open discussion for AC members to share topics still needing attention**
- Invitation for members to express any evolved or updated perspectives based on ongoing discussions**

Cahill raised the topic of insurance and training techniques, asking whether either should be included in the regulations.

Coughlin said prohibiting any training techniques would be very controversial, and it's best left out of regulations. She clarified that the only restriction she feels should be included is that dogs should not be subjected to training methods that involve withholding food. She also said that any training methods used should be listed in the disclosure statement given to the owner.

Cameron stated that the Draft Care Plan includes a section on tools for training.

Mather said that Ollie's Law was intended to create safer environments, not to regulate how dogs are trained. However, consumers should know if adverse tools are being used.

Doyle said she feels the cruelty statute is a high bar and asked whether there might be a way to prevent distress beyond a disclosure.

Mather stated that she felt that limiting training in regulations would be against the intent of Ollie's law.

Coughlin said that proving that an animal is in distress due to an adverse training method would be very hard. There is also a mindset that feels that if a training method could save a dog's life, it should be tried.

Pacheco asked if daycares are using adverse training methods.

Mather stated that it does happen in daycares and gave a bark collar as an example.

Doyle said that she agreed with the enforcement concern.

Cahill said the regulations will cover boarding, daycare, and training facilities, and will require adequate food and access to water. Withholding adequate food from a dog for training would be a violation.

Cameron asked if items such as an e-collar would be included on a disclosure statement.

Cahill said the disclosure statement will likely just be a document the owner initials.

VI. New Business

- Open floor for any new items AC members would like to raise**

Baxter asked that emergency plans be revisited.

Cameron said that she sent a draft medical form. When discussed, they landed on treating it as a resource rather than a requirement, since some organizations will already have their own document to use.

Baxter asked whether an emergency plan was discussed.

Doyle asked to recirculate the medical recommendation form that she had previously shared with the committee members.

Mather said she would add reviewing the document to the next agenda.

Baxter asked, "How do you define having a relationship with a veterinarian?"

Mather answered that the kennel would need to identify the veterinarians they use and the facilities they transport animals to.

Cahill asked the committee members if any of them had strong feelings against requiring core vaccinations such as distemper, parvovirus, and rabies.

Baxter asked why kennel cough isn't included in the core.

Doyle stated that because kennel cough is not life-threatening.

Baxter motioned to adjourn at 10:32. Cameron gave a 2nd. Meeting adjourned.