

Ollie's Law Advisory Committee Meeting  
Minutes February 10th, 2026 | 9 AM – 10:30 AM  
*Approved 3/18/2026*

**Advisory Committee Attendance**

Amy Baxter  
Kevin Sullivan  
Mike Cahill  
Louis Pacheco  
Jeni Mather  
Dr. Erin Doyle  
Francine Coughlin  
Debra Cameron  
Carmen Rustenbeck  
Katherine MacKenzie joined at 9:15 AM

**Advisory Committee Absence**

Kara Holmquist -in general audience, could not be promoted to panelist  
Mark Hogan-absent for meeting  
Noelle Wilson

**MDAR Attendees**

Sheri Gustafson

**Public Attendees**

33 additional ZOOM attendees

This open meeting was held virtually over the ZOOM webinar platform. 840 0281 2719  
Meeting ID: Passcode: animal

**Agenda with Minutes**

**I. Attendance**

Advisory Committee roll call

Advisory Committee roll call performed by Mather. Cahill-present, Pacheco-present, Doyle-present, Coughlin-present, Cameron-present, Rustenbeck-present, Sullivan-present, Pacheco-present, Baxter-present.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Review and approval of 1/6/2026 meeting minutes (vote required)

Mather started the discussion on the approval of the minutes from 1/6/2026. She stated that she wanted the minutes clarified regarding her opinion on overnight ratios. She asked whether she could submit a clarifying statement stating that some of the comments she made were in response to concerns submitted by the public. Gustafson responded that she could send the statement to her and that she would review it with the MDAR legal team.

Rustenbeck said she was not present at the last meeting, but she is listed as attending. Gustafson would correct that.

Mather asked for a vote to accept the minutes. Cameron-accepted, Cahill-accepted, Pacheco-accepted, Doyle-accepted, Coughlin-accepted, Baxter-accepted, Sullivan- abstained.  
Minutes from 1/6/2026 accepted.

### **III. Review of statute and Advisory Committee recommendations**

“Section 174G. (a) The department shall promulgate rules and regulations for commercial boarding or training kennels, including those located at a private residence, which may include, but not be limited to, licensing, inspection, compliance and enforcement, use of best practices and operation, provider and staff to animal ratios, fire and emergency planning, injury reporting, group sizes and supervision, minimum housing and care requirements, indoor and outdoor physical facility requirements, utilities, body language interpretation, breed familiarity, dog handling, insurance, proper education and training of commercial boarding or training kennel staff, including, but not limited to, dog daycare staff, operational safety standards, risk management and consumer education and protection.”

Mather read the Excerpt from the Ollie’s Law Statute listed on the agenda. She said she wanted to make sure the AC felt they had covered all the points they wanted to give MDAR an opinion on. She asked the AC if there were any topics that should be revisited for further discussion.

Cahill responded that he felt there had been adequate discussion of the topics for MDAR.

Pacheco asked if they still needed to vote on topics or if the discussions were enough input for Cahill.

Mather said she had asked the department for clarification and was told that votes were not required. She further stated that she agreed with Pacheco that votes may be beneficial to show solidarity amongst the group on matters.

Cahill said that, usually for legislative purposes, a study can be done, and that study then generates a report at the end. However, an AC does not have that requirement and does not need to submit a report for review. The discussions during AC are enough to provide the department with the information it needs. The department will review the minutes for an adequate summary of what was discussed.

Mather said that she was thankful to have the opportunity to discuss the topics and was glad that the legislature brought this group together. She also said that she will think about if a summary document might help.

Mather mentioned that one topic she would like to revisit is that of adequate physical space. She mentioned to the group that ACOs currently inspect and determine how many dogs can be in an area, but there are many factors to consider, and she felt some guidance might be helpful. She mentioned that most of the industry recommendations she has seen are in the 40-70 square feet per dog range.

Rustenbeck said that IBPSA recommends 70-100 square feet per pet dog for play space but then goes down to as low as 40 square feet per dog for small dogs and for some activities.

Cahill asked if those recommendations were for dogs in overnight or daycare scenarios.

Rustenbeck said that community boarding for overnight stays would still have the same minimum square-footage recommendations. She also stated that if there are no attendants overnight, then the dogs should be kept in their own enclosures.

Cahill asked for clarification on whether her term "community boarding" referred to co-mingled or group housing. Rustenbeck confirmed.

Coughlin asked if the AC really needs to come up with numbers for minimum space. She felt that trying to determine an adequate amount of space per dog could get muddy.

Cahill stated that he felt that having a minimum number in the regulations would prevent confusion and greatly varying opinions at the municipal level. No guidelines might leave the topic too loose.

Mather said she agreed with Cahill and felt that, without some kind of guidance, ACOs could set unrealistic standards and have a negative effect on businesses.

Pacheco said that he agreed with Cahill and Coughlin but felt that creating a forum or subcommittee to discuss space and all the factors involved would be beneficial.

MacKenzie said that, from an ACO perspective, it would be nice to have a base number to refer to, which might help prevent different standards from town to town.

Sullivan said that as an ACO, he defaults to the numbers in the tethering and confinement statute, which is 100 square feet per dog.

Mather said that when she previously discussed the appropriate area with Sullivan, they discussed what she felt was the gold standard. She also said she felt the gold standard number would be too high and could unintentionally harm businesses if used. She suggested considering a lower number of 40-50 square feet per dog, or the teacup size recommendation, as the minimum standard.

Sullivan said that he felt 40-50 square feet per dog was too low.

Mather said she wanted to be careful not to propose too many changes at once to businesses.

Doyle said that she felt there was an opportunity to use the minimum requirements as a starting point.

MacKenzie agreed with Doyle that it would be helpful to have the minimum number stated for the ACOs.

Mather asked if the AC of 40 square feet per dog was too small?

MacKenzie said she would like to hear from members of the AC in the industry about that number.

Coughlin said she honestly felt she could not answer that question and would need to research before commenting.

Cameron said that she felt there were many factors to consider when determining that number and that she would also like to research more.

Rustenbeck said she was looking for a standard, and on Dog Gurus, a sufficient play area is stated to be at least 75 square feet unless all dogs in the area are under 30 pounds. If all dogs weigh less than 30 pounds, 40 square feet per dog is enough.

Cameron said that she felt those numbers were helpful, but is concerned it would be very difficult for ACOs to enforce.

Sullivan said that when he goes to a facility to evaluate, he considers numerous factors, and he is not going in there with a calculator and measuring tape. He felt that square footage was a tool ACOs could use when needed.

Mather commented that, since the sizes and types of dogs at a facility will vary day to day, it would be difficult for a business to run if the requirement were the gold-standard recommendations.

Cahill said it might be wise to return to Doyle's original position and agree on a number that would essentially serve as "the floor". For example, if the minimum square footage in the regs was 40 square feet per dog, the business will need to adjust accordingly if they have a lot of larger dogs. The ACO could discuss the matter with them, considering factors beyond the minimum area required.

Sullivan said he agreed with Cahill and that when he goes in for an inspection, he often has a base number he adjusts based on other factors.

Pacheco commented that he agreed with everything said and suggested that a matrix might be helpful. He also felt that each room should have a maximum number, similar to what the fire department does.

Rustenbeck said that a minimum baseline sounds like what they need, especially since dogs might be rotated. She said she felt 40 square feet sounds good, but also questioned if it was too high.

Mather said that she would like the AC to consider a lower number since they are already changing so many things for the businesses.

Cameron asked if ACOs would still have the authority to set a different number if needed.

Mather said yes: ACOs could set a different number; for example, if they were trying to prevent a recurring issue, they could set a higher number.

Cahill said that he feels the group should stick to, “Under no circumstances should there be more than (determined number) of dogs.” ACOs could then set stricter requirements if needed.

Sullivan stated that he did not feel that the number should be less than 40 square feet.

Rustenbeck said that, for her, the challenge is that she does not know the current average for MA facilities.

Mather said that she could get behind a smaller number to protect businesses.

Pacheco said that he sent Gustafson a matrix.

Coughlin said that she is not comfortable setting a number at this time.

Sullivan said that 30 feet is too small. He stated that he felt the minimum should be 40 square feet and that the AC should not set the bar lower than the standard recommendations.

Mather said that if there were no further comments, they should move on to the next agenda item.

#### **IV. Unlicensed Kennels and Enforcement**

##### **A. Discussion of possible penalties**

##### **B. Language review from kennel regulations from other states.**

- North Carolina:

The requirement for a boarding kennel license from the Animal Welfare Section also applies to in-home boarding services for dogs and/or cats. This includes providing boarding services advertised through online pet-service companies and other online lists. Operating a boarding facility without a valid license could result in up to a \$5,000 civil penalty for each violation. In addition, operation of a boarding kennel without a valid license is a Class 3 misdemeanor where each day of operation constitutes a separate offense

- Pennsylvania

(7) A person who operates a kennel without first obtaining the appropriate type and class of kennel license from the department commits a misdemeanor of the third degree. ((a.1) amended Oct. 23, 2023, P.L.114, No.18)

(a.2) Civil penalties and remedies.--The following shall apply to civil penalties and remedies for unlicensed kennels: (1) In addition to proceeding under any other remedy available at law or in equity for a violation of a provision of this act or a rule or regulation adopted or order issued under this act, the secretary may assess a civil penalty, in addition to any penalty under section 903(c), against an unlicensed kennel of not less than \$1,000 nor more

than \$5,000 for each day it operates in violation of this act. The penalty shall be premised on the gravity and willfulness of the violation, the potential harm to the health and safety of the animals and the public, previous violations and the economic benefit to the violator for failing to comply with this act. ((1) amended Oct. 23, 2023, P.L.114, No.18)

Baxter kicked off the conversation, saying enforcement of unlicensed kennels is an area that she cares deeply about since Ollie's injuries happened at an unlicensed kennel, and the town where it happened is still not complying with kennel licensing requirements.

Mather said she pulled statutes from other states. The wording listed in the agenda is from two of the states with the harshest penalties.

Cahill said the question of enforcement will be whether the language is broad enough for the department to penalize a municipality for noncompliance. He acknowledged the frustration he has received when he explained that almost a third of the state's municipalities aren't reporting their kennel as required by Ollie's Law, but he is unsure what the department can do. He will ask the department's legal team for guidance.

Mather asked if they could hold an individual accountable if they have a kennel and are unlicensed.

Sullivan stated that ACOs have authority over individual kennels, but they can't force a municipality into compliance. He asked whether MDAR or the MSPCA could inspect or enforce.

Cahill said that the MSPCA may have authority under a different section of the law. MDAR will be used only when a municipality lacks the ability or is not fulfilling its responsibilities. In most cases, the department will try to support the local ACO but will handle the situation directly due to limited resources and inspectors.

Mather commented that she believed there was a provision in the law that held the municipality accountable. She mentioned that she will look into it and put the matter back on the next agenda for additional discussion.

Sullivan said there are penalties in the law, but he feels it would be very hard to enforce them for a municipality.

Cameron asked if the list of noncomplying municipalities was public.

Cahill said the department was required to submit a report to the legislature, but he will have to check whether the list is public. He later said that the list is public and on the Ollie's Law Information webpage.

MacKenzie asked if umbrella companies can be held responsible.

Mather said that the AC could continue the conversation on a future agenda.

## **V. Discussion: Will there be a roll-out period for kennel regulation compliance?**

Due to time, this topic was tabled for a future agenda.

#### **VI. VI. MDAR kennel correspondence**

Mather commented that the AC only receives correspondence from the public if an email is sent to MDAR, addressed to the AC. So, if the public wants the AC to review something, they should address it to the AC when sending it to the department.

#### **VII. New Business**

- A. Open floor for any new items Advisory Committee members wish to raise.

Mather said that there was a bill filed to allow kennels to have alternative options other than having clients' dogs wear collars and ID when at facilities, and that the bill needs support. To give support, businesses should reach out to their legislators.

Rustenbeck gave a motion to adjourn, Pacheco gave a second. Meeting adjourned at 10:31AM.