

Ollie's Law Advisory Committee Meeting
Minutes March 18th, 2026 | 9 AM – 10:30 AM
DRAFT

Advisory Committee Attendance

Amy Baxter joined at 9:22 AM promoted to Panelist at 9:34 AM

Kevin Sullivan

Mike Cahill

Louis Pacheco

Jeni Mather

Francine Coughlin

Debra Cameron

Carmen Rustenbeck

Kara Holmquist -joined 9:04 AM

Katherine MacKenzie- left 10:22 AM

Noelle Wilson- joined at 9:05 AM promoted to panelist at 9:19 AM

Advisory Committee Absence

Mark Hogan-absent for meeting

Dr. Erin Doyle- absent for meeting

MDAR Attendees

Sheri Gustafson

Katie Foote

Public Attendees

13 additional ZOOM attendees

This open meeting was held virtually over the ZOOM webinar platform.

Meeting ID: 857 0053 5396 Passcode: animal

Agenda with Minutes

I. Attendance

Advisory Committee roll call

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

II. Approval of Minutes

Review and approval of 2/10/2026 meeting minutes (vote required)

Mather asked for a vote to accept the minutes. Sullivan-accepted, Cahill-accepted, Pacheco-accepted, Mather-accepted, Coughlin-accepted, Cameron-accepted, Rustenbeck-accepted, Mackenzie-accepted, Holmquist-accepted.

Minutes from 2/10/2026 accepted.

III. Legislative Update

Update regarding recent or proposed amendments related to Ollie's Law
Holmquist gave a legislative update. Stated that there are bills that have been filed that have many parts. One contains language about allowing for exemptions for collars and tags to be required in kennels. While the matter of collars and tags was not changed by the Ollie's Law legislation, it became more in focus. She stated that some animal bills have moved quickly and been reported favorably; however, there probably won't be much more movement until late Spring or early Summer due to the budget talks. Kara mentioned that the bill to delay kennel regulations for 5 years was probably premature, since the draft regulations haven't even been released yet.

Mather commented that she felt the delay in the regulation bill was counterproductive to the industry and that it should have been a more reasonable ask, not 5 years.

Holmquist thanked Coughlin for submitting testimony on the collars-and-tags bill.

Coughlin stated that she also felt a 5-year grace period for regulations was too long and counterproductive to the industry.

Mather asked Cahill for an update on the timeline for the regulations.

Cahill stated that a draft of the regulations will come out at the same time as the announcement of the public hearing. The public comment period will also be announced. After those are completed, MDAR will review all comments and redraft the regulations if needed. During the public hearing, a hearing officer will be collecting information. Cahill encouraged that comments be submitted in writing, even if they will also be presented verbally. Once all materials have been reviewed, a final draft of the regulations will be prepared. He said that, beyond the summary he just gave, he cannot give a firm timeline of when things will happen. Under the law, the deadline was June, but he felt that it would probably take longer.

Mather asked to jump to an Item later in the agenda to continue the current conversation.

V. Regulatory Implementation Discussion

- A. Review of Advisory Committee timeline
- B. Discussion of potential roll-out period for kennel regulation compliance

Mather stated that under the proposed meeting schedule, they had only one more meeting date, March 31st, 2026. She stated that while this meeting will be decided next week, it might make more sense for the AC to have the next meeting after the draft regulations are posted.

Mather asked the committee for their thoughts on a fair and reasonable rollout period for the regulations. She asked if 6 months seemed reasonable.

Cameron asked for clarification on whether Mather meant 6 months from when the regulations are rolled out or from the date of inspection.

Mather stated that she was referring to rollout from regulation promulgation.

Sullivan asked the group why a rollout period is necessary. He stated that ACOs often give kennels a timeframe to correct issues and felt that could be sufficient.

Pacheco said he would like to see a bullet list of potential regulations before deciding. Then each item on the list could be determined individually.

Coughlin asked if ACOs already have the authority to enforce safety issues.

Sullivan responded that they do have laws they can use, but many are subject to interpretation; the regulations will give them greater authority to enforce matters.

Cahill said to keep in mind that there is always enforcement discretion and that the regulations are being created to ensure minimum standards of care are met. Waiting 6 months to establish and enforce a low bar is going to be a hard pill to swallow. Cahill said he didn't think square footage requirements would be in the regulations, since there isn't enough data or information to establish what they should be.

Rustenbeck said she liked the idea of a rollout and felt the ACOs should be used to determine the best time. Throughout this whole process, kennel business owners have been watching the meetings, so none of what could potentially be in the regulations should be a surprise to them. The kennel regulations will not be a sudden change.

Mather stated that these regulations have been discussed over the last 5 years, but maybe something needs to be in writing so that ACOs aren't overly zealous or lax right when regulations are put in place.

Coughlin asked whether MDAR could serve as a go-between to help navigate discrepancies between businesses and ACOs.

Cahill stated that MDAR really doesn't have that authority and that we train the ACOs, but we can't regulate them.

Baxter said she opposes the proposed bill granting a 5-year grace period and asked whether there will be an opportunity for the public to comment on it.

Holmquist said that the bill was just released from Ways and Means and is headed to the floor. She advises that if someone opposes it, they should reach out to their own senators or to legislators active in the field.

Baxter asked if there would be an issue if she reached out directly to Finegold on the matter. Holmquist said there was no issue with it and that she could try to have a conversation with him to explain why she is opposed to the grace period.

Baxter commented that she felt any grace period longer than 90 days would be a mistake. She said the only issue that may take more time is staffing requirements, but those potentially could be addressed within a reasonable timeframe.

Mather stated that she agreed the biggest lift could be staffing ratios and that it would require some planning from kennel owners.

Rustenbeck said she felt a rollout period may be needed for small business owners, but ACOs already seem to have the discretion to give a reasonable amount of time for any improvements needed.

Mather said that a 60-day rollout period might help with regulatory support.

Cahill said he is not opposed to a grace period but stressed that it is important to remember the regulations are meant to establish minimum standards, and he can't imagine ACOs will be "kicking down doors" to get kennels into compliance right at the beginning.

IV. Unlicensed Kennels and Enforcement

Discussion regarding enforcement related to unlicensed kennel operations and compliance with kennel licensing requirements.

- A. Discussion of possible penalties for unlicensed kennel operations
- B. Unlicensed kennel listing
 - 1. Prevention
 - 2. Consumer protection and education
- C. Consistency in municipal implementation of kennel licensing requirements and enforcement
- D. Discussion regarding potential accountability mechanisms when kennel licensing requirements are not enforced locally
- E. Discussion regarding commercial platforms or umbrella companies facilitating unlicensed kennel operations

Mather moved the discussion to the enforcement of unlicensed kennels by asking: if someone is operating a kennel without a license, what can be done? What about the municipalities that are not enforcing the laws? Commercial platforms that advertise to people should be required to ensure that kennels have a license to do the activities.

Pacheco asked if MDAR could hold a municipality responsible.

Holmquist said they did include additional enforcement options in one of the latest bills and pointed out that Gustafson posted a list of municipalities reporting compliance and those not in compliance on the Ollie's Law Information page. Consumers can check that list to see if their community is reporting to MDAR.

Sullivan asked if there could be a state-approved list and if the state could send out kennel licenses.

Cahill responded that MDAR doesn't have the manpower to take on such a large task, since they have only about 10 field staff, and there are currently over 1,000 kennels reported. MDAR could possibly do a list, but the information would need to be provided and submitted by the municipalities. He also stated that there is nothing in the current statute that allows MDAR to enforce non-licensed kennels.

Sullivan said he feels many noncompliant towns are so because they don't have updated bylaws. He asked if there are sample bylaws that can be utilized.

Mather asked for clarification on whether he was suggesting that sample wording or kennel licenses be created.

Baxter commented that East Longmeadow still does not have kennel licenses. She asked whether the ACOs could post a sign stating that the kennel is not licensed.

Cameron said that she feels a public list of licensed kennels, posted and updated monthly by MDAR, would be helpful and the easiest way for consumers to check.

Cahill commented that he does feel MDAR is moving towards that. Public education may be the key, giving the public a way to check and, in turn, put pressure on any municipality that fails to meet licensing requirements.

Pacheo asked if that would punish kennel owners in towns that aren't complying.

Cameron said if a kennel is not licensed, it should not be operating. The town can pull from bylaws from other MA towns that are doing things correctly.

Mather asks how we can enforce unlicensed kennel listings that don't even provide addresses.

MacKenzie replied that yes, advertised kennels should list addresses. She said she sometimes only hears about a kennel after a dog-to-dog issue is reported. She feels there needs to be a way to hold businesses accountable that list services being performed at unlicensed kennels.

Mather said that she has seen language in kennel regulations from other states that address that issue.

Sullivan stated that he used to see full names and locations posted on Rover, but they no longer provide that information. He has reported that to an ADA, but nothing has been done so far.

Mather said that the issue might be solved by simply requiring addresses to be disclosed.

Cahill said that the main issue with the existing law is that MDAR cannot fine for violations; it only has the authority to suspend or revoke kennel licenses. That prevents them from doing anything about unlicensed kennels operating. The regulations will require kennels to provide their names and addresses.

VI. New Business

Open floor for any additional items Advisory Committee members wish to raise.

Mather asked whether there was anything outstanding that Cahill or the department would still like to discuss.

Cahill said that he believed that the AC covered all outstanding questions.

Mather asked for the opinions of the rest of the AC and stated that if there was nothing outstanding, the next proposed meeting might not need to take place.

Pacheco asked if they felt they needed a list.

Mather replied that they don't.

Cahill said that he felt the department has gotten the direction they need and that there are no statutory requirements for the AC to create a report.

Cameron asked if this is the last AC meeting, will they continue to get updates.

Cahill responded that the committee is not disbanded until possibly December, so as long as the AC is still together, the rules still apply to deliberation.

Several AC members thank the Committee for meeting and for the kennel discussions.

Cahill said they can get back together after the draft is released to discuss but remember: nothing can be changed until after the public hearing and public comment period.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 AM.