

Ollie's Law
Guidance for ACOs & Shelters/Rescues

MDAR
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Division of Animal Health is responsible for licensing and inspecting shelters/rescues, inspecting municipal animal holding facilities, and for providing training and guidance to animal control officers (ACOs). We want to provide shelters/rescues and ACOs with information on the changes created by the passing of Ollie's law, how the changes will affect them, and a timeline of when the changes will take effect, so we developed this document.

In 2020, a 7-month-old labradoodle by the name of Ollie was severely mauled by other dogs at an East Longmeadow boarding facility. Ollie spent two months in a veterinary hospital before ultimately succumbing to his injuries. Ollie's death could have been prevented if proper care and safety measures were in place at the boarding facility. Unfortunately, stories like Ollie's are not unique. It was clear to advocates that there were significant gaps in kennel oversight and that legislative changes were necessary to help prevent tragedies like Ollie's.

On September 20th, 2024, an Act to Increase Kennel Safety (AKA Ollie's Law) was signed by Governor Maura Healey. The passing of Ollie's law gives the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) the ability to work with an appointed advisory committee to create standards and enact regulations for commercial boarding and training kennels, including dog daycares. Ollie's Law also clarifies existing kennel license requirements, requires municipalities to report kennel licenses to MDAR, requires kennels to report any injuries that occur to the municipality, and establishes enforcement protocols for the municipality, which allow the state to assist when necessary.

Committee Appointment

Letters of interest currently being accepted!

The MDAR Commissioner is responsible for appointing the advisory committee that will assist the Department in developing these regulations. Among the members of the committee are an owner of a licensed boarding or training kennel with a capacity of less than 50 dogs; an owner of a licensed boarding or training kennel with a capacity of more than 50 dogs; two animal control officers; a licensing authority representative; a veterinarian; an interested member of the public; a dog owner that uses the service of a licensed boarding or training kennel; a certified animal behaviorist; a person with five years of experience in training people about dog behavior; and a representative from a licensed shelter or rescue. Because each of you are qualified to serve on the committee and may work with others who meet the descriptions above, we are asking for your recommendations for members of the advisory committee.

Anyone that is interested in participating should send an email to Commissioner Ashley Randle, at **Ashley.Randle@mass.gov**. We appreciate your interest and assistance.

Kennel License Requirements

Did not Change

MGL Chapter 140 Section 137A. (a) A person maintaining a kennel shall obtain a kennel license. Private kennels (more than 4 dogs), commercial kennels (1 or more dogs, held for boarding, holding, daycare, overnight stays, or training), commercial breeder kennels, domestic charitable kennels, and veterinary kennels (holding dogs for non-medical reasons) must have kennel licenses. Dogs under 3 months of age do not count for licensing purposes.
Full definitions can be found in MGL Chapter 140 Section 136A.

Key Changes

Effective December 19, 2024

- Commercial boarding or training kennels shall maintain records of individual dog licenses for all dogs in its care that are required to be licensed under Chapter 140 Sec. 137.
- All dogs over 6 months of age must wear rabies tags at all times and individual dog license tags (when required under Chapter 140 Sec. 137).
- All municipalities **must** have a process for issuing and revoking kennel licenses.
    - A municipality cannot choose to not issue kennel licenses, if kennels (by definition) are allowed in the municipality.

Key Changes -effective 12/19/24 continued

- A licensing authority **must** specify the type of kennel license and the maximum number of animals allowed in a kennel and this number must be on their kennel license.
  - The maximum number of animals must be determined by the ACO and the licensing authority.
- There is new language for the process for revoking commercial boarding and training kennel license/non-compliance. .
  - A licensing authority shall issue, suspend, renew, and revoke kennel licenses.
  - The issuing municipality determines the licensing period.
- There is new language about kennel inspections. **A kennel license cannot be issued until a passing kennel inspection has been completed by the ACO**. ACOs must also inspect prior to license renewal.
  - Additional kennel inspections may be done by authorized officials: Mayor, select board member, Boston Police Commissioner, Town Manager, Police Chief, or the ACO.
  - All kennels must be inspected at least annually.
- Commercial boarding or training kennels shall report to the licensing authority injuries to animals or people that occur on their premises and the licensing authority shall investigate all reports. Under the new MGLs, MDAR has the authority to assist with investigations and enforcement when necessary.
  - MDAR shall develop a form for such reporting and a time frame for submitting a report after an injury. The form shall be available on the MDAR's website for the public to report such injuries.
  - If MDAR brings enforcement action against a kennel due to an investigative report, MDAR must make the report publicly available on its website.
- All municipalities are required to submit to MDAR a list of kennels and their addresses for compliance review. First list of licensed kennels must be submitted on or before June 1, 2025. A portal for submitting information can be found at www.mass.gov/info-details/ollies-law-information

Future Key Changes

Under MGL Chapter 140 Section 174G, regulations for commercial boarding and training kennels need to be promulgated by the state (MDAR) by June 2026. Until those are promulgated there will not be specific standards that govern commercial boarding and training facilities. They are still required to be inspected – just as all other kennels are.

When regulations for commercial boarding and training kennels are developed, MDAR is required to provide notice and any education or training programs to local authorities.

Enforcement actions should be done on a municipal level but MDAR will have the authority to assist/enforce when necessary.

Future MDAR Regulations

May include

Administrative: licensing, inspection, compliance and enforcement, use of best practices and operation;

Animal Safety: provider and staff to animal ratios, fire and emergency planning, group sizes and supervision, minimum housing and care requirements, indoor and outdoor physical facility requirements, utilities;

Employee Safety and Training: body language interpretation, breed familiarity, dog handling, insurance, proper education and training of dog daycare staff, operational safety standards, risk management, and consumer education and protection.

Ollie's Law Timeline

Bill signed	September 20, 2024
Law takes effect	December 19, 2024
Committee formed	March 19, 2025
Municipalities must send kennel list to MDAR by	June 1, 2025
MDAR reports to legislature	July 1, 2025
Regulations completed by	June 2026
Committee sunsets	December 31, 2026

Information Links

For up to date information about Ollie's Law changes and resources visit:

https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ollies-law-information

Mass Animal Fund created an Animal Laws in Massachusetts PDF for reference. All changes from the Acts of 2024 including Ollie's Law changes are highlighted in yellow.

https://www.mass.gov/doc/animal-laws-and-regulations-in-massachusetts-2024-edition/download

Please reach out to MDAR if you have any questions about the Ollie Law changes!

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES CONTACTS

Patricia Cabral Shelter/Rescue Coordinator
Division of Animal Health
Patricia.Cabral@mass.gov

Sheri Gustafson, Program Coordinator
Massachusetts Animal Fund / Division of Animal Health
Sheri.Gustafson@mass.gov