

Ollie's Law Advisory Committee Meeting
Minutes Oct. 21 th, 2025 | 9 AM – 11 AM
Approved 11/18/2025

Advisory Committee Attendance

Mike Cahill
Louis Pacheco
Jeni Mather
Carmen Rustenbeck
Dr. Erin Doyle
Noelle Wilson
Francine Coughlin
Debra Cameron
Kara Holmquist
Kevin Sullivan
Amy Baxter
Kathy MacKenzie

Advisory Committee Absence

Mark Hogan-absent for meeting

MDAR Attendees

Jessica Burgess
Sheri Gustafson

Public Attendees

27 additional ZOOM attendees

This open meeting was held virtually over the ZOOM webinar platform. 821 8197 8002
Meeting ID: Passcode: animal

Agenda with Minutes

I. Attendance-Advisory Committee Roll Call

Mathers started meeting at 9:00 AM by roll call.
Pacheco-present, Doyle-present, Rustenbeck-present, Coughlin-present, Holmquist- present,
Wilson-present, Sullivan-present, MacKenzie-present, Baxter-present, Cahill-present, Cameron-
present

II. Approval of Minutes-from September 17th, 2025 (vote required)

Mather motioned to accept minutes from 9/17/2025. Pacheco-approved, Doyle-approved,
Rustenbeck-abstained (not present at last meeting), Wilson-approved, Coughlin-approved,
Cameron-approved, Holmquist-approved, Sullivan-approved, Baxter-approved, MacKenzie-
approved, Cahill-approved. Minutes from 9/17/2025 accepted.

III. MDAR Check in to clarify regulations timeline, and Advisory Committee scope

Burgess spoke to the AC. She answered a previous question about the possibility of AC subcommittees and site visits. Burgess clarifies that while a site visit is allowed, the AC would need to be careful not to hold any deliberation; otherwise, the visit would need to be an open meeting platform, and MDAR would not have the technical capacity to host. Burgess also clarified that any subcommittee formed would still need to adhere to all open meeting laws and that MDAR would find it challenging to provide the admin staff needed to support subcommittees.

Burgess discussed the purpose of the advisory committee: to advise MDAR, but that doesn't mean they need to vote on matters or be in agreement. They do not need to draft regulations; rather, they should use their expertise in the subject matter to provide feedback on what they feel should be regulated and what shouldn't.

Mather stated that she would like to direct the public to submit any comments to the MDAR admin listed on the Ollie's law information webpage, rather than reaching out to the individuals on the committee directly. By utilizing the MDAR, admin comments can be collected in an orderly manner.

Rustenbeck stated that she will need to leave the meeting a little early.

IV Staffing Ratios

Mather began the staffing ratio discussion by stating that her goal was to make recommendations that were fair to the majority of business owners. She stated her recommended staffing ratios as follows: If dogs are not comingled, 1 staff member is needed for every 15 dogs. If dogs are comingled, 2 people are needed for more than 4 dogs and up to 15. For comingled dogs over 15, an additional person is needed for each additional 15 dogs.

Coughlin asked Mather to share her screen so she could see the written recommendations.

Rustenbeck agreed on the presented ratios.

Sullivan agreed with the presented ratios but asked whether further clarification was needed to distinguish between staffing and supervision in playgroup settings.

Mather stated that the 1 staff to 15 dogs ratio would also apply to supervision for playgroups. For example, if there were a playgroup of 60 dogs, then 4 staff members would need to supervise. However, Mather felt that playgroups should be limited to 50 dogs.

Sullivan asked whether it would make sense to cap playgroups at 45 dogs to make enforcement easier.

Mather stated that she strongly felt that the cap on playgroups should be 50. Mather also gave an example of an incident in which 10 dogs were comingled with just one staff member. When an incident occurred, the staff member was able to call 911, but help was delayed because no additional staff member was there to unlock the entrance door.

Pacheco stated that he was comfortable with the ratios as presented, but also noted that the size of dogs in playgroups should be considered.

Coughlin said she disagrees with moving the playgroup max to 45 dogs just because it is divisible by 5. She feels a 50 dog max for playgroups is okay.

Baxter stated that she agrees with the stated ratios, but also urged the committee to consider the human factor when an incident happens.

Holmquist stated that she agrees with the stated ratios but feels they should clarify whether supervision or staffing is being measured.

MacKenzie stated that the presented ratios were clear and reasonable.

Doyle stated that she felt that the ratios were reasonable.

Cameron said she agreed with the presented ratios.

Wilson agreed with the ratios as presented.

Cahill agreed with the ratios as presented.

V. Discussion: Staffing / Operator Education and Training

A. Employee and Owner/ Operator Training and Education Requirements

- 1. Foundational animal behavior knowledge and baselines**
- 2. Baseline competencies in husbandry, medical awareness, and basic first aid**
- 3. Review of Potential Learning Platforms for Kennel Staff**
- 4. Review Potential Testing Platform**

Mather moved the conversation to education and employee training.

Rustenbeck said that when IBPSA considers education, they aim to ensure it is beneficial to the specific services being provided. She further stated that they don't recommend a specific education platform but instead try to ensure education covers the basics.

Coughlin listed what she felt were core training needs: pet first aid and CPR, dog body language, basic dog bite prevention and fight handling, leash handling, and sanitation.

Mather said that she would add evaluations to that list.

Cahill said that while the general structure of the training topics would be appropriate, MDAR could not endorse a specific platform. He also asked how training would be enforceable.

Mather suggested that a list of certifications could be required.

Doyle said she felt that being trained in pet CPR and first aid was not as important as simply knowing how to recognize medical issues and who to call.

Cameron suggested that maybe there could be a training checklist for each staff member. Mather asked for the ACO's opinion. She also stated that while she felt all staff should be properly trained, it might be more reasonable to require only certain people.

Holmquist said that she likes Cameron's idea of a list and that it could work in the disclosure piece.

MacKenzie said that as an ACO, they have required training that MDAR tracks.

Cahill said tracking kennel staff training would be a much larger task, and to keep in mind that the ACO training program is made possible by donations, which is why it is able to be staffed.

Burgess also stated that ACO training is mandated by legislation.

Doyle asked for clarification on whether they should require training or knowledge.

Pacheco stated that he felt that the state's participation would need to be much larger if training were required.

Mather asks what if it wasn't everyone on staff but just the owners.

Lou asked who would be able to enforce training.

Baxter asked if the state is currently taking action against the 1/3 of municipalities that have failed to report their licensed kennels.

Cahill stated that there was no enforcement mechanism built into Ollie's law against municipalities, so currently, all they can do is list who is and isn't in compliance.

Mather asked about the fines in the law and if they could apply to the municipality.

Cahill stated that there is language that if someone violates the law, they can be fined, and the fees would go to the municipality.

Holmquist and Cahill agreed to investigate the matter further.

Sullivan stated that, of the towns he oversees, all are in compliance, but he knows some of the nearby municipalities are not due to outdated bylaws.

Burgess reminded the committee that only municipalities can create bylaws under relevant MGLs and that there is no expectation that the committee develop enforcement rules.

Mather asked to return to the topic of education, and she believed the important topics are dog evaluations/intakes, dog body language, dog bite and fight handling, and sanitation.

Coughlin felt intake procedures should not be listed.

Pacheco stated that he felt safety training needed to be mentioned.

Mather felt safety training belonged more under emergency planning.

Doyle wanted to add that staff should know how to recognize contagious diseases.
Mather said that she felt that they had a good list of core competencies.

VI. New Business

A. Open forum for additional committee input

B. Topics for future agenda development

Sullivan suggested they make sure to discuss facility size and sheltering requirements.

Mather asked whether they should just refer to the animal cruelty laws.

Holmquist stated that she feels it's important to require minimums before a matter reaches the cruelty level.

Cahill suggested looking at the shelter/rescue regulations for many guidelines. He also mentioned that there are regulations for guard dog businesses. All regulations strive to ensure that minimum standards of care are met, and they do not set gold standards.

Cameron asked to share a document called "Care Plan Agreement Draft."

Mather asked what topics the group wants to discuss in future meetings.

Coughlin stated that she would like to see the Care Plan revisited, discuss how long a dog can be left unsupervised, and talk about sanitation.

Mather asked for any other new business.

Coughlin asked about the legislative timeline.

Burgess commented that a draft of the regulations will likely be ready by early spring, followed by public comment sessions soon after.

Coughlin asked if it would be helpful for the committee to wrap up their discussions on topics by the end of the year.

Burgess said it would.

Mather commented that according to her proposed schedule, the next meeting dates are 11/18/2025, 12/2/2025, and 12/17/2025.

Cahill said he will review past meeting minutes and try to determine if there are specific topics he'd like to see discussed more.

Sullivan motioned to adjourn the meeting, Baxter gave a second.
Meeting adjourned at 10:51AM.