

Animal Record Requirements

for Town and City Clerks

MASSACHUSETTS ANIMAL FUND

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Division of Animal Health provides resources and training to municipal Animal Control Officers (ACOs) and Animal Inspectors (AIs). We would like to extend our resources to town and city clerks since their collaboration with ACOs is essential to ensure the health and safety of animals in the community they serve.

Dog Licensing



MGL Chapter 140 Section 137: All dogs 6 months or older must be licensed. A newly acquired dog or a dog that is new to the town has 30 days to obtain a license if it is 6 months or older.

The license tag must be inscribed with the dog's license number, city, and year of issue.

License fees are determined by municipalities with the following considerations: spayed/neutered dogs shall be less than intact dogs, no fee shall be charged for an ADA-defined service dog, and a municipality may waive the fee for a dog owned by a senior 70 years or older.

A license requires proof that the dog has a current rabies vaccination. Medical exemptions for rabies vaccinations are only valid if signed by a Massachusetts veterinarian for an immune-mediated disease or anaphylaxis.

All licensed dogs should be listed on the municipal licensing list maintained by the licensing authority. ACOs are required to check this list for matches when a dog is found at large, to allow this the list must be accessible and easy to search. The licensing list should contain the license number and status, rabies vaccination expiration, a detailed description of the animal, and the owner /keeper's address and contact information.

Individual dog licensing currently does not apply to dogs at a licensed kennel that are OWNED by the kennel licensee, or dogs housed at a research institution.

ACO Records in Clerk's Office



MGL Chapter 140, Sections 151A (b): ACOs must keep and maintain records on each animal in the officer's custody. All domestic animals (alive or deceased) and wildlife (alive) require records.

A copy of these records must be forwarded to the town or city clerk every 30 days. Copies of the records shall be kept in for 2 years in the office of the city or town clerk. It is acceptable to keep these records in an electronic format if needed.

www.mass.gov/animalfund

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Kennel Licenses Inspections and Renewals

GL Chapter 140 Section 137A: personal kennel licenses are required for more than 4 dogs, that are 3 months of age or older, on a property (unless the bylaw states a lower number). Examples of a personal kennel are a hobby or individual breeder, a foster home for shelter/rescue, or a regular household.

Commercial kennel licenses are needed for dog boarding, daycare, commercial breeding, shelters/rescues, and veterinarians holding animals for longer than medically necessary. Charitable organizations such as licensed shelters/rescues should have no licensing fee. Starting in 2025, all licensed kennels must be reported to MDAR. MDAR has a kennel reporting portal at https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ollies-law-information.

If a municipality has its holding facility for animals in ACO care only, that facility does not need a kennel license. Pet shops do not need a municipal kennel license since they are inspected and licensed through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources.

ACOs are responsible for all kennel inspections for licensing and renewal, and inspections must be conducted before initial licensing and before renewal. Kennel inspections (for non-licensing purposes) should be performed by the ACO, but if there is a conflict of interest or the ACO is unavailable the inspection can be performed by a selectman, mayor, police chief, town manager, or police commissioner.

Under the current statutes, kennels are inspected to make sure they are maintained in a sanitary and humane manner. A standard definition of sanitary is: the state of facilities, primary housing enclosures, and associated equipment are cleaned and disinfected as often as necessary to be free of, at a minimum, urine, feces, and noxious odors.

Municipalities can add further clarification into bylaws to define that all licensed kennels have adequate shelter, waste is managed properly, there is adequate ventilation, adequate temperatures are maintained, and all cages, enclosures, and housing are in good repair.

The inspecting ACO should set the limit on the number of dogs in the facility by considering the size of the space, the staff's ability to maintain sanitary conditions, and the establishment of sensible emergency plans for unexpected situations.

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources has created a kennel inspection form that can be utilized for inspections. These forms can be found at: mass.gov/info-details/aco-resources

Mass Animal Fund

The Mass Animal Fund can provide no-cost spay/neuter/vaccination assistance for animals in need across the Commonwealth through its Voucher Program.

ACOs can request vouchers for cats and dogs in ACO care, for cats and dogs owned by low-income residents of the communities they serve, and for feral cats that will be released back in the field. More information about this program can be found at mass.gov/animalfund.



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