



STATE OF MAINE  
 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
 ANIMAL WELFARE PROGRAM  
 28 STATE HOUSE STATION  
 AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0028



JANET T. MILLS  
 GOVERNOR

AMANDA E. BEAL  
 COMMISSIONER

**Complaint # 19615**

**Accused:** Kathleen O'Connell  
**Address:** 222 Ridge Rd, Wales

**Nature of complaint:** Animal cruelty; lack of necessary medical attention, necessary sustenance, humanely clean living conditions

On November 5, 2019 I accompanied District Humane Agents Angela Rogers, Doug Radziewicz, Rae-Ann Demos, Rachel Welch and Rick Hunyadi, municipal Animal Control Officers (ACOs) Wendel Strout and Rich Burton, several deputies from the Androscoggin Sherriff's Office, support staff from the Maine Animal Welfare Program and transport personnel from several Maine-licensed animal shelters to 222 Ridge Road in Wales for the purpose of executing a search warrant to look for evidence of animal cruelty. Upon arrival to the property at approximately 9:35am, I observed a several cats running around the property, on the porch of the farmhouse and in and out of an attached barn. Two other barns were on the property, and I could see cats in the vicinity of both barns. I followed the Sherriff's Deputies, District Humane Agent Rogers and ACO Strout up the driveway, where we were met by the male occupant of the property, Ms. O'Connell's father. While discussion regarding our presence ensued with Mr. O'Connell and Ms. O'Connell was summonsed from within the house, I was able to observe several cats in the windows of the house.

Upon gaining entry to the house, I followed District Humane Agents Rogers and Demos as well as ACOs Strout and Burton in a walk-through to assess the health of the cats and the general living conditions. While it was difficult to count the exact number of cats as they were continually moving from room to room, it was quickly apparent that there were more than 50 cats in the house. Most of them appeared unhealthy with evidence consistent with an upper respiratory infection (URI), poorly groomed coats and over half of the cats that I picked up to evaluate during the walk-through were thin. The entire house was extremely cluttered, and dirt, cat hair, cat litter and cat feces were present on the floors as well as most surfaces of the house. There were several litter boxes present throughout the house, but most were full or almost full of cat excrement. There were piles of shopping bags with dirty cat litter and feces in one of the rooms. After noticing several areas of the house had a strong smell of ammonia, I used a handheld device to measure the ammonia level in the areas of the house that seemed to be the most affected. The levels ranged from 8-10ppm of ammonia, which is elevated (normal is 0 ppm). After observing the condition of the cats and the living conditions that they were subjected to, the decision was made to seize all of the cats in order to provide them with necessary medical attention, necessary sustenance and humanely clean living conditions.

I worked with District Humane Agent Welch, a licensed veterinary technician, to set up a staging area in the kitchen of the house, so that each cat could be photographed, labeled and a brief triage exam could be performed in order to identify cats that had immediate medical needs. Due to the large number of cats, staff members began to catch cats in the house and they were presented, one at a time, to either Agent Welch or

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myself for this brief assessment. Additional staff members set up live traps in the barn areas in order to catch the cats that were outside. As the process of catching the cats was difficult for staff members and stressful for the cats, brief observations about health and medical issues became more and more difficult. Out of the 83 cats and kittens that were removed from the house, 61 (over 73 %) were noted to have at least one medical issue that required attention. Most notably the presence of an upper respiratory infection, ear mites, severe dental disease or a combination of those conditions were the most prevalent. Two cats were in need of immediate medical attention and were transported to a nearby veterinary clinic for evaluation and treatment. In addition, a litter of very young kittens was discovered that required specialized attention as the mother was very thin and very sick, which prevented her from properly caring for and providing a sufficient milk supply.

Several cats were unable to be caught, both in the house as well as in the barns on the property, and approximately 25 guinea fowl that were found to be kept in a pen with no access to water were unable to be seized, as Ms. O'Connell or her father let them out of the pen despite being instructed not to interfere with the execution of the search warrant by both Animal Welfare Program personnel as well as law enforcement. All of the cats that were seized were transported to an emergency shelter run by a Maine-licensed animal shelter so they could receive necessary medical attention, necessary sustenance and be provided with humanely clean living conditions. Agent Rogers provided Ms. O'Connell with the required documentation of Animal Welfare Program activity, including a seizure identification form that outlined the animals removed from the property and I left the scene at approximately 3:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'R Fiske DVM'.

Rachael Fiske, DVM  
Assistant State Veterinarian