



JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

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



AMANDA E. BEAL  
COMMISSIONER

### Veterinary Summary Report

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**Prepared for:** State of Maine Animal Welfare Program

**Case:** 19615

**Accused:** Kathleen O'Connell, 222 Ridge Road, Wales, ME

**Materials reviewed for the report:**

- Reports from search warrant conducted on November 5, 2019
- On-scene triage notes from November 5, 2019
- Intake exam notes/observations from shelter housing animals in custody
- Veterinary medical records from animals seen for necessary medical attention while in State of Maine custody

**Summary of Reports following Search Warrant executed on November 5, 2019**

After reviewing the reports written as part of Animal Welfare Program protocol following execution of a search warrant, multiple, repeated violations of the State of Maine Animal Welfare Laws were found, most notably the failure to provide humanely-clean living conditions for all of the animal seized in addition to a lack of necessary medical attention provided to nearly all animals seized.

**Summary of Triage Notes compiled during seizure of cats on November 5, 2019**

After reviewing the triage notes that were made as cats were captured in and outside the residence at 222 Ridge Rd in Wales, four observations were consistently found in an abnormally and unacceptably high number of cats. Several of the cats were noted to have a body condition score (BCS), an objective measurement of an animal's condition where 1 is emaciated and 9 is obese, of 3 or less (thin) despite evidence of cat food at the property. In addition, three significant medical findings were ubiquitous within this population of cats and included clinical signs (symptoms) consistent with an Upper Respiratory Infection (URI), stomatitis (severe inflammation of the gums, gingivitis) and evidence of ear mites. None of the cats appeared to be under veterinary care or management for any of these conditions, as no evidence of veterinary prescribed products, medical records or invoices were found during a thorough search of the house. Two cats had bandages on them, presumably applied by Ms. O'Connell, and were immediately transferred to a local veterinary clinic for medical attention so that the bandages could be removed in a clean, controlled environment and medical attention could be provided as needed.

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## **Summary of Intake Exam Notes from November 6, 2019**

Following removal of the cats from 222 Ridge Road in Wales, the cats were examined more thoroughly and basic core vaccines, disease screening, treatment for internal and external parasites were administered and treatment for medical issues was initiated while the cats were held in State custody. In reviewing the exam notes that were made on November 6, 2019, similar findings to the triage exam were found in greater detail, as the environment was more conducive to thorough examination of each cat in order identify medical problems and implement or plan for cat-specific treatment. 57 of the 82 cats (69%) of the cats were noted to be a BCS of 2-3/9 (very thin to thin). Over 70% of the cats had clinical signs consistent with a URI (nasal discharge, sneezing, conjunctivitis) and were treated with systemic antibiotics and/or eye medication. 49 of 82 cats had moderate to severe stomatitis or related dental disease; 10 cats were referred for extensive, urgent dental cleanings and extractions to treat this painful condition as it was causing significant suffering and inappetence. Approximately one-third of the cats had ear mites or evidence of previous ear mite infestation. Several of the cats were also noted to have neurologic abnormalities and further veterinary evaluation was recommended.

## **Summary of Veterinary Medical Records for cats while in State of Maine custody**

In addition to medical treatment that was initiated at the licensed shelter after each of the cats were examined during the intake procedure, over 70 of the 82 cats (85%) were seen by a veterinary clinic that is veterinarian of record for the State-licensed shelter where they were kept in State custody and were provided with necessary medical attention. Most of the cats were seen to address ongoing URI symptoms, secondary eye conditions such as conjunctivitis and corneal ulcers and dental disease, however some cats were examined for conditions such as hemorrhagic gastroenteritis (bloody diarrhea) and urinary tract infections. In addition, several cats that were showing signs of neurologic disease were examined and one was referred to a specialty veterinary medical center for a neurology consult. The working diagnosis for this cat, and likely the other cats showing similar signs, is a condition called cerebellar hypoplasia, in which the portion of the brain that controls fine motor activity is affected in utero, most often by a herpesvirus that has infected the mother cat during a certain stage of pregnancy, causing URI symptoms in the mother and causing permanent neurologic impairment to the unborn kittens in varying degrees of severity. In addition, this cat was also diagnosed with a nasopharyngeal polyp, likely a result of prolonged inflammation in the upper airway and middle ear due to an untreated URI, which was surgically removed. Unfortunately, on November 20, 2019, one cat (C5, a young adult female) began to show neurologic signs accompanied by intermittent aggressive and lethargic, unresponsive behavior consistent with rabies. The cat had been recently vaccinated, however any potential exposure history over the past 4 months was unknown so, due to poor prognosis for recovery and due to public health concerns, humane euthanasia was authorized and rabies testing was performed at the Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory. The cat did test negative for rabies so control measures (quarantine of additional cats) were not necessary.

## **Summary**

In summary, compromised animal welfare was at the core of this case. Some of the suffering was obvious to lay onlookers and professionals alike, such as thin animals, poorly treated wounds, obvious infectious diseases and unsanitary living conditions. In addition, less obvious although no less important forms of suffering existed in an inability to avoid or retreat from other animals in the house that posed a threat, lack of access to necessary sustenance while sick from an upper respiratory infection and severe, painful stomatitis that affected the ability of the cats to eat properly. These stressors are an issue when attempting to care for a population of animals because their effects are considerably magnified. In this case the whole was considerably greater than the sum of its parts in that failure to provide proper care to one animal inevitably

affected the rest, for instance in the promotion of infectious disease. The detrimental effects of crowding allowed for infectious diseases to gain foothold in the absence of an adequate preventative health program. Stress from crowding, inadequate nutrition (or inconsistent access to nutrition) and untreated medical conditions decreased resistance to disease and lack of sanitation facilitated the diseases' spread. The larger the population of animals being cared for, the more precise the caregiving must be in order to maintain population health and prevent unnecessary suffering, as prohibited by Maine's animal cruelty statutes. In this case, there was a complete disregard for both the obvious infectious diseases that many of the animals suffered from as well as an apparent lack of awareness of the detrimental effects of insufficient medical care, insufficient sustenance and lack of humanely-clean living conditions which caused suffering to both individual cats as well as the population as a whole.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Fiske DVM', written in a cursive style.

Rachael Fiske, DVM  
Assistant State Veterinarian