

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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131st MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2023

Legislative Document

No. 1216

S.P. 497

In Senate, March 20, 2023

An Act to Create the Animal Cruelty Task Force

Reference to the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry suggested and ordered printed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D M Grant'.

DAREK M. GRANT
Secretary of the Senate

Presented by Senator HARRINGTON of York.

1 **6. Staff.** The department shall provide necessary staffing services to the task force.

2 **7. Funding.** When a member of the task force who is an employee of a state agency,
3 except for a member who is a humane agent, is assigned to investigate a case of animal
4 cruelty under this section, that state agency is responsible for establishing the salary and
5 benefits, including overtime, of that member, and the State shall reimburse that state agency
6 monthly through the animal welfare auxiliary fund established under section 3906-B,
7 subsection 16. The task force is also authorized to accept donations made to the
8 investigation of an animal cruelty case.

9 **8. Powers and duties.** The task force has the following powers and duties.

10 A. At the request of a municipality, the task force may provide guidance and support
11 for animal cruelty cases that involve a large number of animals, involve safety concerns
12 or are complex in nature.

13 B. The task force shall identify ways to assist municipalities with the identification
14 and handling of animal cruelty cases.

15 C. The task force shall identify ways to assist with the prosecution of animal cruelty
16 cases, including the prompt holding of a full hearing regarding the possession of the
17 animal in accordance with Title 17, section 1021, subsection 3 and seeking petitions
18 for the posting of a security in accordance with Title 17, section 1027.

19 D. The task force shall recommend measures to streamline reporting of animal cruelty
20 to local law enforcement agencies for immediate documentation and assessment.

21 E. The task force shall identify and pursue collaborations among law enforcement
22 agencies, the criminal justice system, animal welfare organizations, behavioral health
23 liaisons, community resources and others to aid in the prevention and addressing of
24 animal cruelty.

25 F. A law enforcement agent serving on the task force may be deputized and may serve
26 a municipality if there is no acting agent for the municipality in the jurisdiction of an
27 animal cruelty case or in the event the animal control officer for the municipality does
28 not have the authority to issue a criminal summons.

29 G. The task force shall review the handling of prior large-scale animal cruelty cases to
30 identify and recommend ways to improve investigation and enforcement.

31 **9. Media policy.** Members of the task force are not authorized to release to the public
32 or a media outlet any information on an animal cruelty case. Requests for information from
33 a media outlet or the public must be referred to the public information officer of the
34 appropriate law enforcement agency. For purposes of this subsection, "media outlet"
35 includes broadcast media, print media and Internet-based media.

36 **Sec. 3. Animal Cruelty Task Force first meeting.** The Commissioner of
37 Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry shall call the first meeting of the Animal Cruelty
38 Task Force, established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 7, section 3906-D, no later
39 than December 31, 2023.

40 SUMMARY

41 This bill establishes the Animal Cruelty Task Force to provide a coalition of trained
42 professionals to assist with and enhance the enforcement of animal cruelty laws.