

ANIMAL WELFARE PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2023



Amanda E. Beal
Commissioner

Randy Charette
Deputy Commissioner

Nancy McBrady
Deputy Commissioner

18 Elkins Lane
Augusta, ME 04333

(207) 287-3200
maine.gov/dacf

Maine's Animal Welfare Program Review for 2023

Our Mission: The Animal Welfare Program (AWP) ensures the humane treatment of animals through communication, education, and enforcement of animal welfare laws.

What we do: AWP develops and implements policies and programs to effectively address animal cruelty complaints; inspects and licenses animal shelters, pet stores, kennels, and animal research facilities; and enforces dog licensing.

Staff:

Field staff

- Acting Field Supervisor
Chrissy MacFarland
- District Humane Agent Aroostook County
Richard Guilbault, Jr.
- District Humane Agent Washington, Hancock Counties
Douglas Radziewicz
- District Humane Agent Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset Counties
Rachel Welch
- District Humane Agent Waldo, Knox, Lincoln, Kennebec Counties
Nicole Doyle
- District Humane Agent Franklin, Oxford, Androscoggin Counties
William Muggle
- District Humane Agent York, Cumberland Counties
Casey Fredette
- District Humane Agent, Inspections
Reginald Manter

Administrative Staff

- Director
Ronda Steciuk
- Secretary Associate
Thomas Rackliff
- Office Associate II
Danielle Trask
- Planning and Research Assistant
Connor Egan
- Assistant State Veterinarian
Rachael Fiske, DVM

Note: AWP financial data is collected and reported on a fiscal year (July 1-June 30) basis. Program data is collected and reported on a calendar year basis. Unless labeled FY 2023, data on the following pages cover the period between January 1-December 31, 2023.

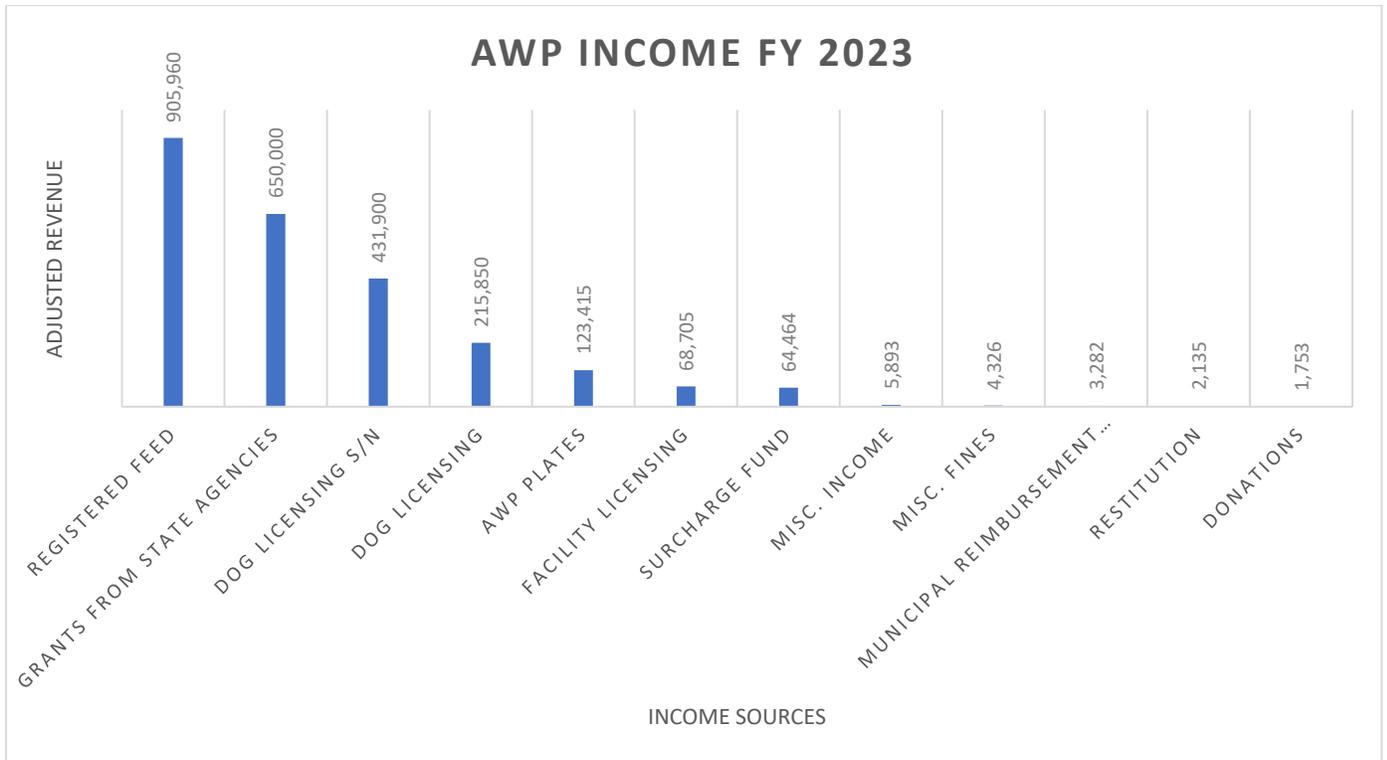
Introduction

2023 was a year of building and change at AWP. In our 2022 annual report, we reported AWP's plans to target several areas of program operations for improvements: updated and more comprehensive yet efficient record keeping and documentation, working with staff to enhance cross-training and information sharing, and implementing additional safety measures for field staff. 2023 yielded additional focus areas, including ACO Certification training and tracking, office efficiencies, and hiring multiple positions.

One area that has remained stagnant is the duration of court cases. The 2021 annual report explained how COVID-related court backlogs that delayed the adjudication of animal seizure possession cases upended AWP's business model; in 2022, we reported a continuation of those delays in court proceedings. We were optimistic that in 2023, the pace of our hearings would pick up, but delays continued. This has continued to result in increased lengths of stays, and the associated costs for seized animals and veterinary care have risen significantly. As the financials shared below show, expenses relating to sheltering animals in 2023 were \$736,255, an increase of 46.65% over 2022; this represented 35.7% of AWP's expenditures in 2023, up from 27.5% in 2022.

Funding for the Animal Welfare Program

Income FY 2023

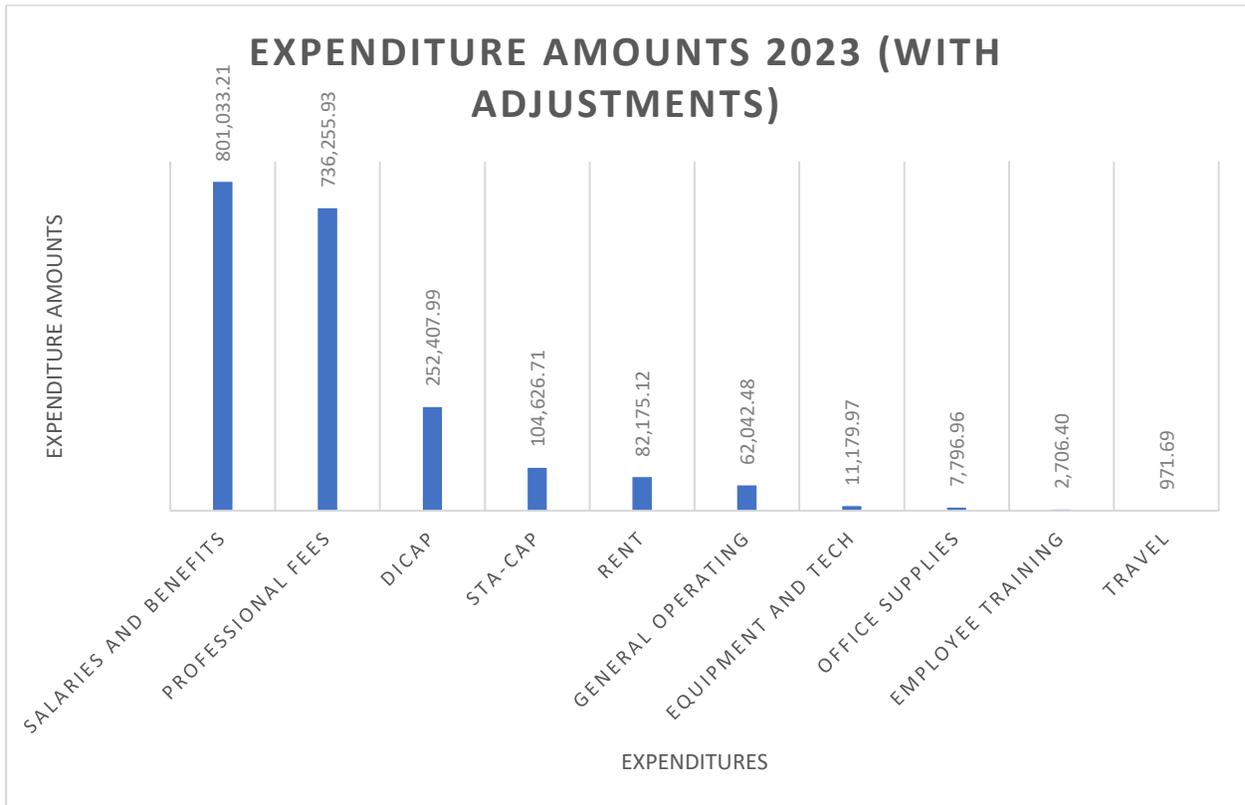


AWP Income FY 2023	
Registered Feed	\$905,960
Grants from State Agencies*	\$650,000
Dog Licensing S/N	\$431,990
Dog Licensing	\$215,850
AWP Plates	\$123,415
Facility Licensing	\$68,705
Surcharge fund	\$64,464
Municipal Reimbursement Dog Licensing**	\$ 3,282
Restitution	\$2,135
Donations	\$1,753
TOTAL	\$2,477,773.00

***For FY2023, AWP received a one-time allocation of \$650,000 of general fund money in the supplemental budget to assist with the ongoing expense of a large seizure of animals in 2022. That matter was ultimately resolved by the Law Court in 2024.**

****When a dog is licensed online, the State receives the full fee, and we must disburse municipalities' portions back to them. This disbursement does not occur until municipalities reach a certain threshold; thus, this fund will have a positive amount at the end of FY 2023.**

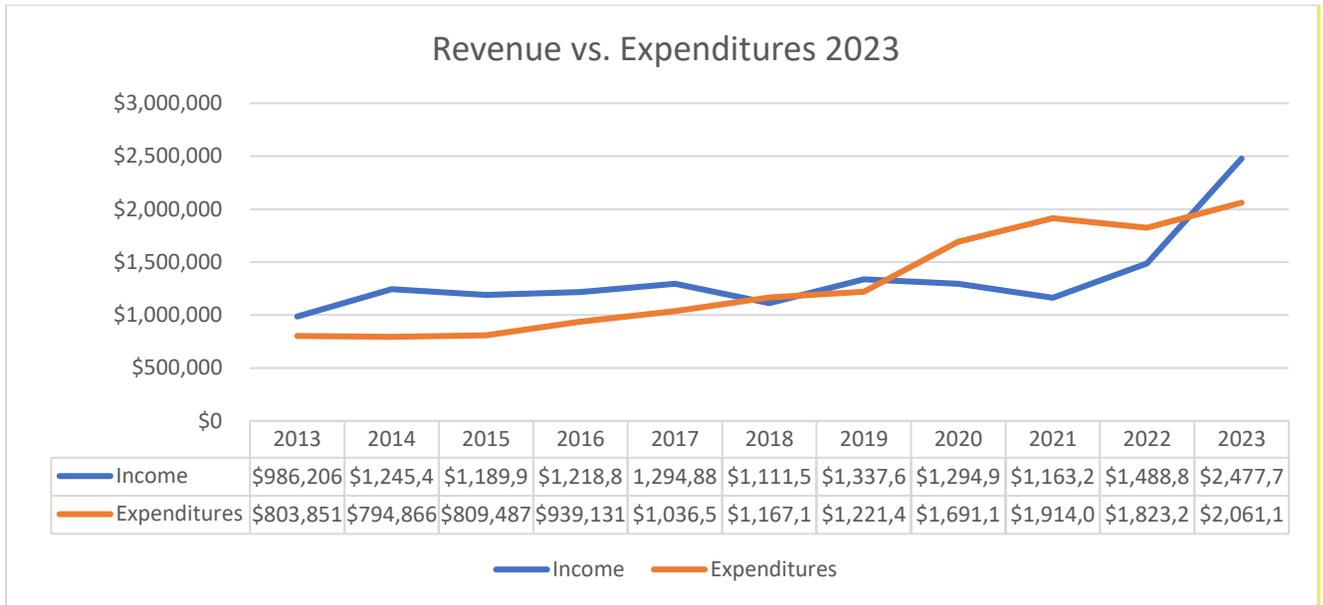
Expenditures FY 2022



Expenses FY 2022	
Salaries and Benefits	\$801,833.21
Professional Fees*	\$736,255.93
DICAP	\$252,407.99
Sta-Cap	\$104,626.71
Rent	\$82,175.12
General Operating	\$62,042.48
Equipment and Tech	\$11,179.97
Office Supplies	\$7,796.96
Employee Training	\$2,706.40
Travel	\$971.69
TOTAL	\$2,061,196.46

****Professional Fees primarily consist of payments to shelters for boarding and veterinarians for the care of animals in AWP's custody.***

Review of Revenue Versus Expenditures



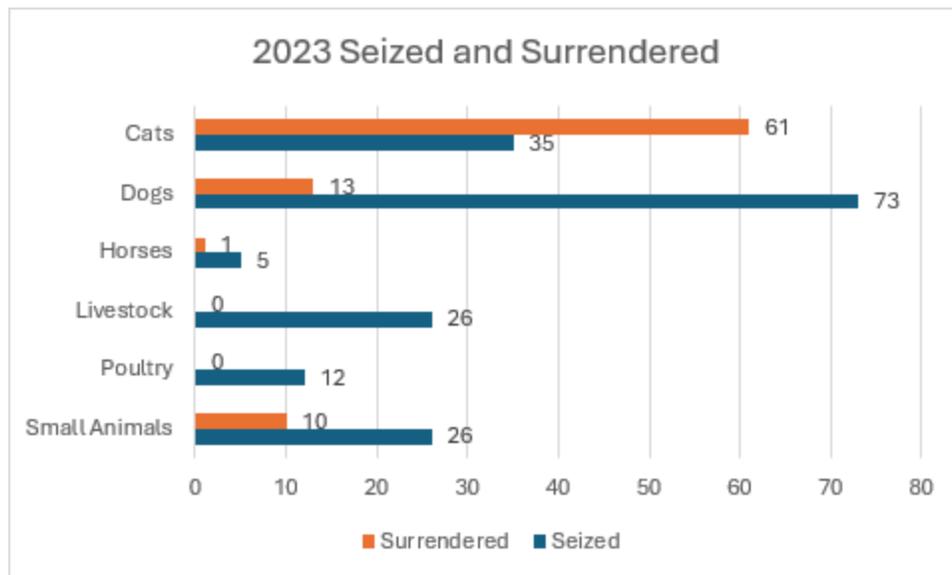
As illustrated in the above graphic, AWP's expenses kept pace with revenue between 2014 and 2019. However, COVID-era backlogs in the courts meant AWP began to have to hold seized animals with shelter partners for more extended amounts of time than what had been typical. These longer stays—frequently for animals with little to no veterinary care before the seizure — coupled with a significant increase in veterinary costs and a full year of realizing the 2022 statutory increase of required payments to shelters for housing seized animals, resulted in our seized animal expenses increasing more than 500% since FY 2019, while our total revenue (minus the one-time special grant funding in early 2023, but including the feed registration fee increase discussed below) has only increased by 36%. It is only due to the special funding that AWP was granted at the end of FY 2022 and the increase in feed registration fees that allowed a net positive outcome in FY 2023. AWP's work is unsustainable without an increase in its income stream.

The feed registration fee increase that passed in the second session of the 130th Legislature and became effective August 8, 2022, is a start to improving AWP's financial viability. The new 80% AWP fee share (the remaining 20% going to the General Fund – a change from a prior 50/50 split) resulted in a gross increase of \$336,320 in FY 2023 over 2022. While this has helped alleviate the expense increases borne by AWP, it doesn't cover the ongoing and increasing costs of administering the AWP. Without the special grant funding, AWP would have run at a deficit again in 2023. Dog licensing is our second most significant funding source; however, it does not provide the revenue intended or necessary to support AWP's work. Dog license fees have not been increased since 2007. AWP's portion of the licensing fees, \$10 for unaltered and \$3 for altered dogs, would need to be adjusted to \$15.20 and \$5.46 to keep pace

with inflation. That 52% increase, in addition to the pet food surcharge share increase implemented in 2023, would have allowed AWP to cover our 2023 costs. It is important to note, however, that AWP had reduced costs in 2023 due to being understaffed for much of the year. Full staffing would require additional funding beyond a license fee adjustment and the increase in feed registration fees.

Cruelty Investigations

In 2023, the AWP office dispatched 308 complaints to Humane Agents, a 45% increase over 2022. Many of the complaints we responded to involved more than one type of violation. For example, reports might list improper care, shelter, living conditions, sustenance, or lack of medical care on a single complaint. Agents advise owners about proper care, available veterinarians, and feed sources. They will often check back even when a case is closed to ensure the animal and the owner are doing well. Dogs and cats are the most common subjects of complaints, but Humane Agents also spend time working with farmers on livestock issues. Humane Agents use community policing methods when enforcing animal welfare laws and have had great success in educating animal owners on their responsibilities as animal owners. Agents use education to resolve many of the complaints. Only a few require tougher enforcement actions, such as summoning for violations or seeking a court order to remove the animals.



As reported last year on January 28, 2022, AWP obtained a warrant and seized 110 cats and 26 poultry from one location in Wales, Maine. Many animals required immediate and significant veterinary attention; unfortunately, some were beyond what veterinary care could provide. This case was delayed and continued several times, and we finally received a possession order in August 2022. The defendant filed a timely appeal, and the animals remained in the custody of AWP, awaiting an appeal decision. The cost to the State for housing and providing veterinary care reached \$1,362,010.34. While AWP prevailed in the Superior Court appeal pending as of the writing of last year's report, that decision was

further appealed to the Law Court. The Law Court ultimately denied the defendant's appeal in mid-2024, and AWP's shelter partners have since rehomed the animals.

Companion Animal Sterilization (Help Fix ME)

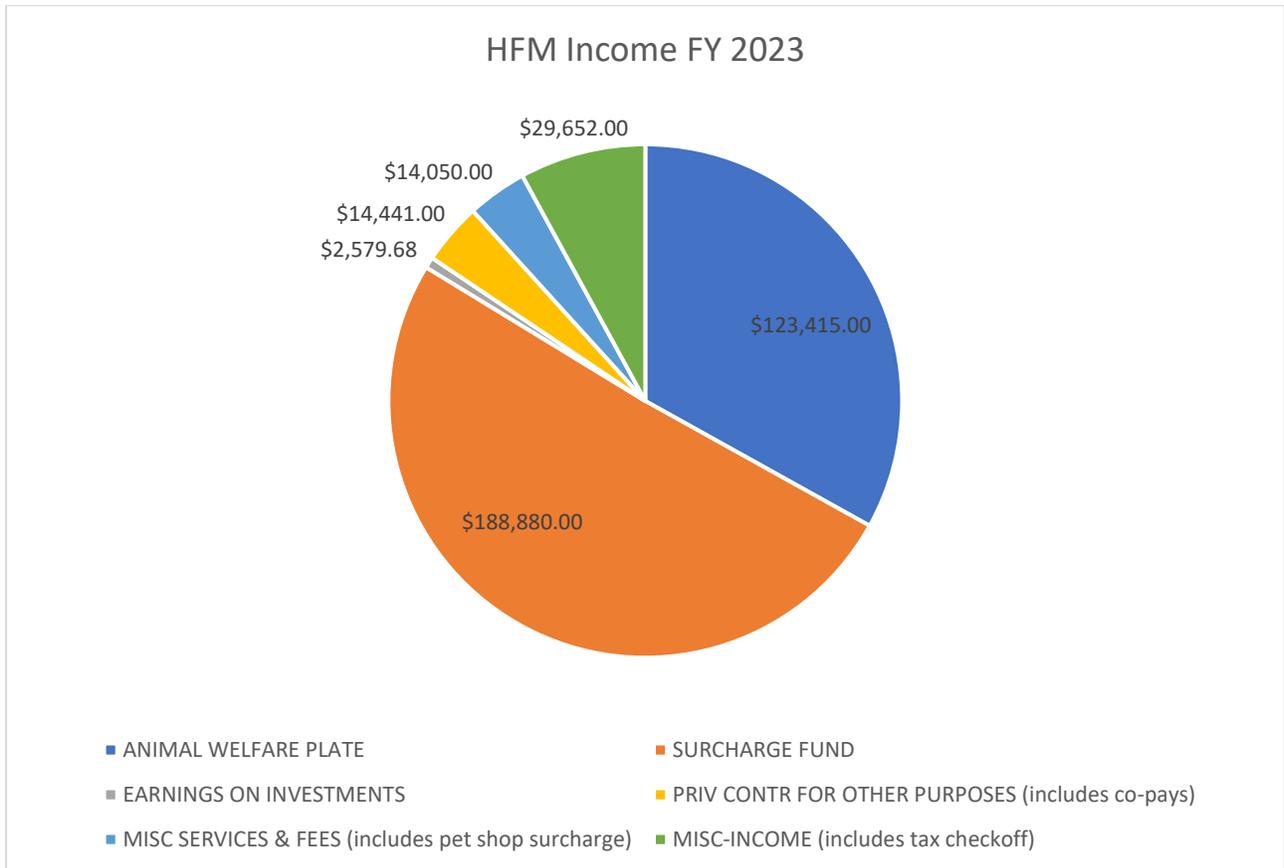
Since 2005, AWP has been operating the Companion Animal Sterilization Fund, best known as the Help Fix Me (HFM) program. Established to encourage qualified pet owners to sterilize their cats and dogs and to help cover the cost of those sterilizations, HFM reduces the number of animals in shelters. This reduction helps to decrease euthanasia and increase adoptions. Since 2009, Help Fix ME has helped pet owners spay and neuter over 24,000 animals. For the past five years, the adoption rate in Maine shelters has been 95%, while the euthanasia rate is around 3%. In comparison, in 2011, the adoption rate was 73%, and the euthanasia rate was 27%.

At the writing of the 2022 report, AWP had commenced rulemaking to address changes in the law per LD 1828, which directed AWP to issue an RFP to engage a contractor to administer HFM. AWP had begun drafting the RFP documents and received commitments from four individuals to serve on the RFP committee when LD 595 was filed. The passage of LD 595 caused AWP to pause the RFP process and undertake new rulemaking, which was completed in May 2024. The final RFP was developed during the Summer of 2024, and, as of this writing, DACF is awaiting permission from the Maine Division of Procurement Services to release the RFP.

In January of 2023, AWP implemented the AWAC's recommendation to begin setting aside 50% of all program revenue to create a starting fund to be available for a third-party administrator. The set-aside continued longer than expected due to the LD 595 delay in the RFP process. Upon AWAC's recommendation, the set-aside has been capped at \$90,000 and is readily available for the program transfer.

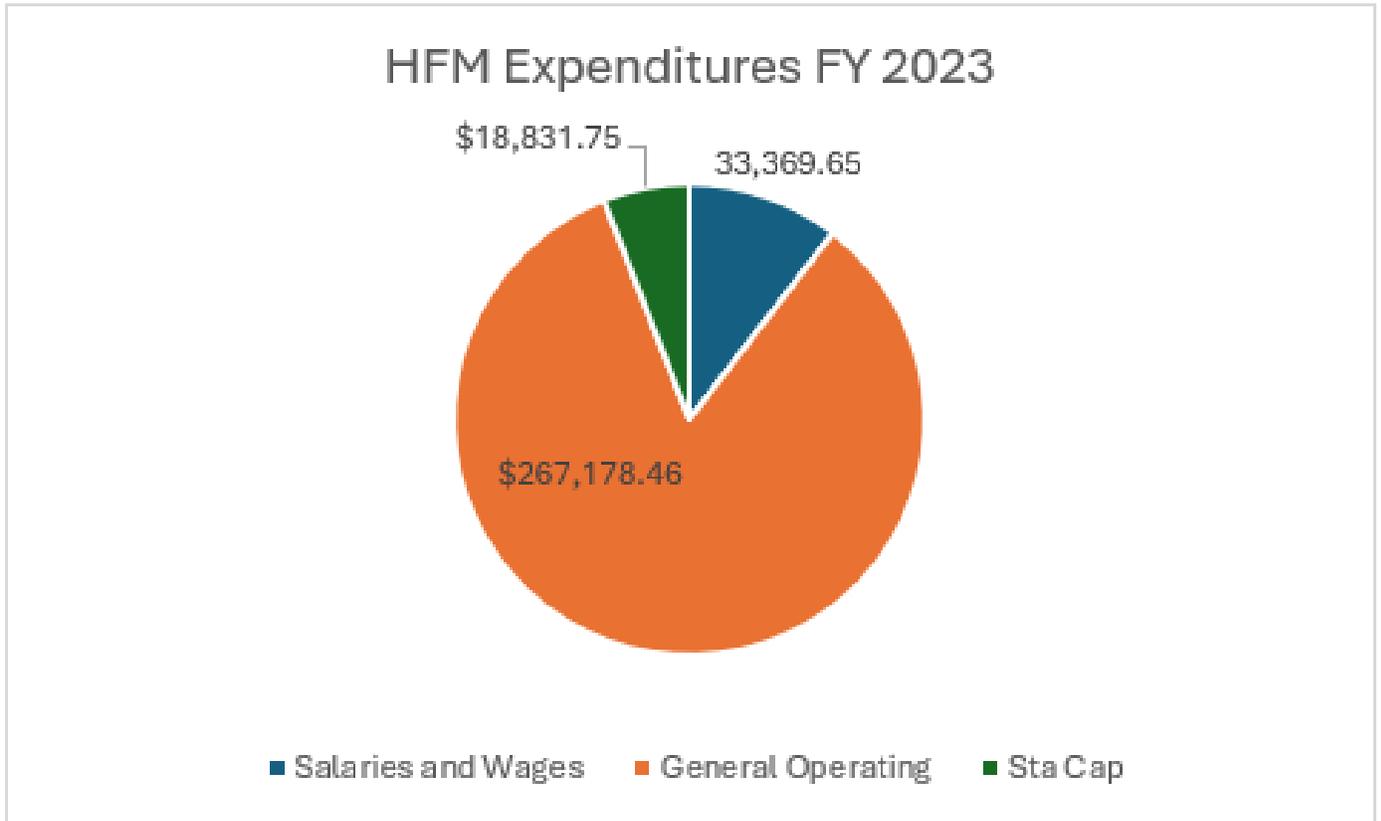
In 2022, funds pooled from unused vouchers during COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021 were joined with 2022 income and concentrated effort on voucher distribution was undertaken by AWP, resulting in over 3,700 spay and neuter surgeries provided through the program. The program entered 2023 with a funding backlog exhausted and tasked with setting aside fifty percent of revenue to ensure startup funding for a new administrator when the RFP process is complete. In 2023, 1,286 vouchers were issued for surgeries, \$90,000 has been set aside for a new administrator, and 1,201 surgeries have been verified and paid. The pet owner's or keeper's location was verified for 1,172 vouchers, with 29 vouchers having unverified locations. AWP also streamlined internal processes for Help Fix ME invoices. Complete and properly submitted invoices are now moved through our office within a week and typically paid out within 30 days.

HFM Income FY 2023



HFM Income FY 2023	
AWP License Plate	\$123,415.00
Surcharge Fund	\$188,880.00
HFM Co-Pays	\$14,441.00
Misc Service & fees	\$14,050.00
Tax check-off	\$29,662.00
Interest	\$2,579.68
TOTAL	\$373,017.68

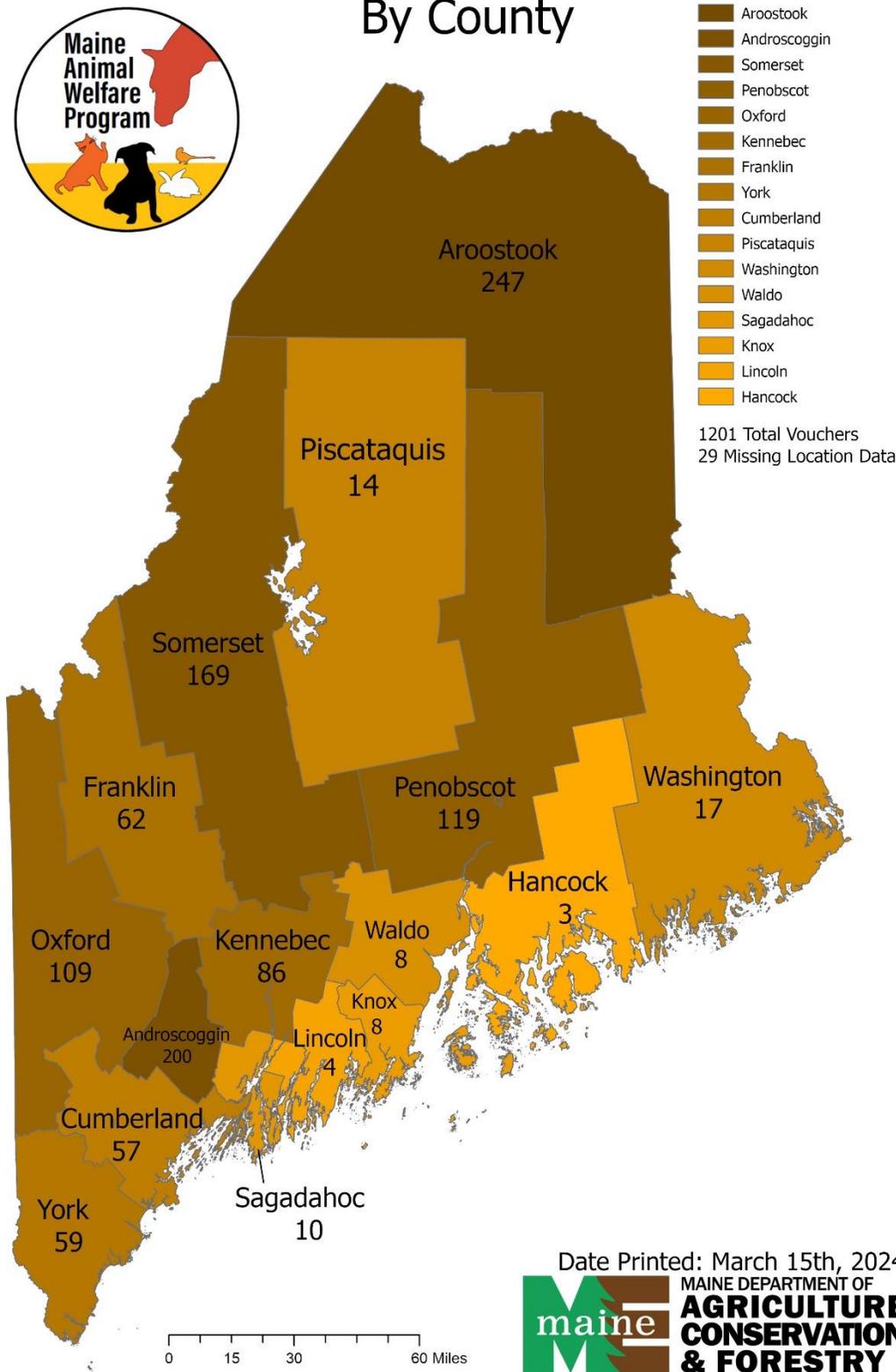
HFM Expenditures 2023



HFM Expenditures FY 2023	
Salaries and Wages	\$33,369.65
General Operating	\$267,178.46
Sta Cap	\$18,831.75
TOTAL	\$319,379.86

*\$90,000 was set aside in 2023 to provide a start-up fund for a third-party administrator

Companion Animal Sterilization Fund Vouchers paid calendar year 2023 By County



**Companion Animal Sterilization Fund (HFM) Vouchers Paid in Calendar Year 2023 by County
Compared to County's Percentage of Total Maine Population**

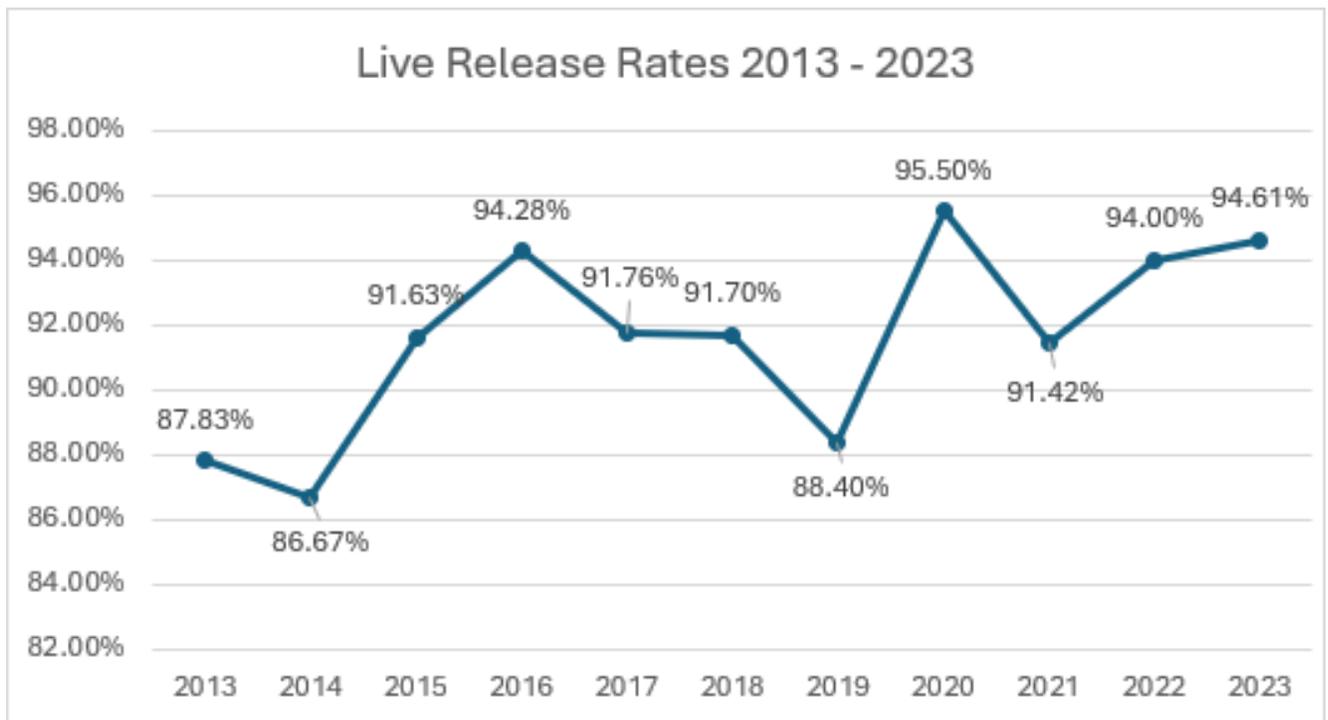
PLACE/COUNTY	Number of Vouchers Given	Percentage of Vouchers Given	Percentage of Total Maine Population (July 1st, 2023)
Aroostook	247	21.7%	4.82%
Androscoggin	200	17.06%	8.15%
Somerset	169	14.41%	3.68%
Penobscot	119	10.15%	11.09%
Oxford	109	9.30%	4.29%
Kennebec	86	7.33%	9.06%
Franklin	62	5.29%	2.19%
York	59	5.03%	15.64%
Cumberland	57	4.86%	22.19%
Washington	17	1.45%	2.26%
Piscataquis	14	1.19%	1.25%
Sagadahoc	10	0.85%	2.69%
Waldo	8	0.68%	2.90%
Knox	8	0.68%	2.97%
Lincoln	4	0.34%	2.61%
Hancock	3	0.2%5	4.09%
Total	1172	99.95%	99.90%

Animal Shelter Survey

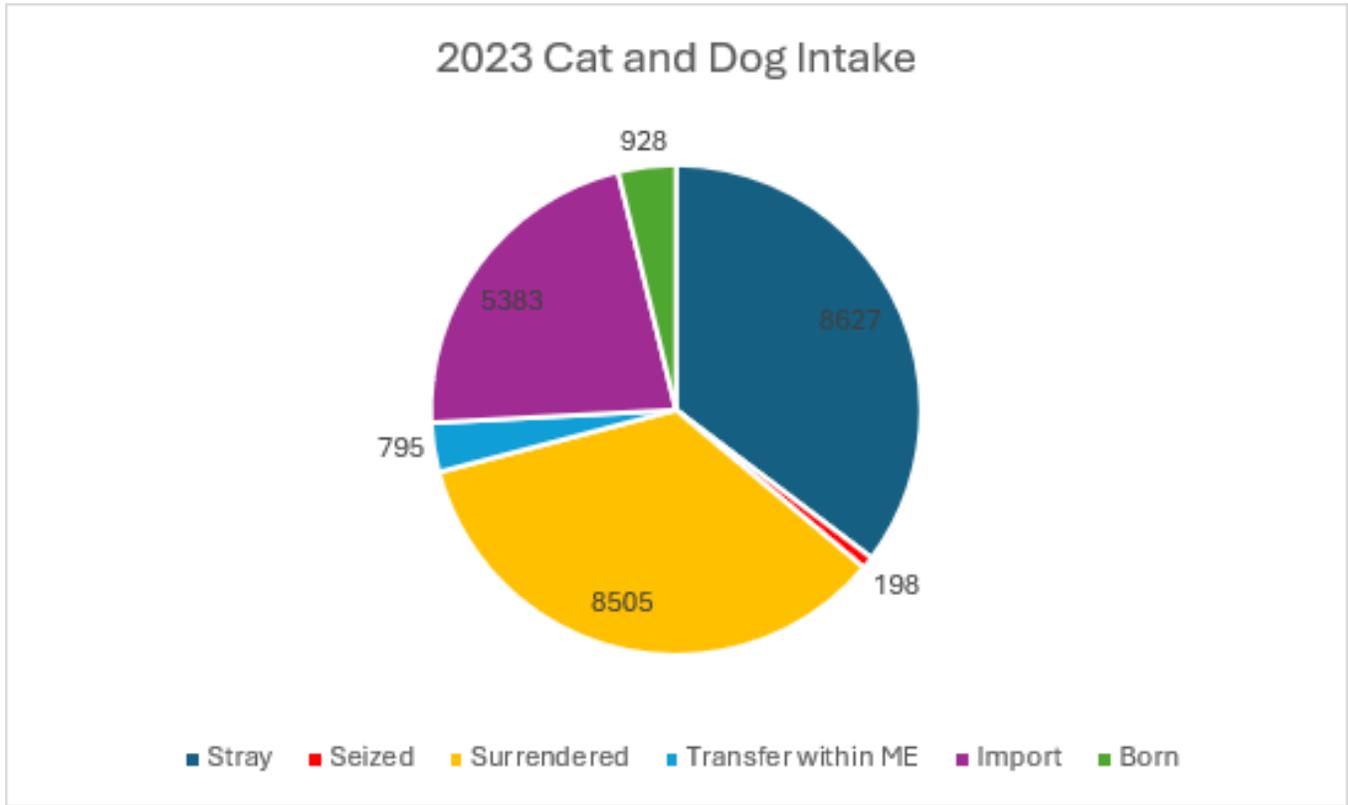
AWP has surveyed all licensed animal shelters in Maine since 2011, gathering extensive data on euthanasia and live release rates. These data points shed light on how Maine's animal shelters have changed over the past two decades, providing vital data. However, beyond our survey, AWP also acknowledges changes in animal sheltering and the critical work shelters do in their communities.

Seventy-one of 139 licensed shelters and rescues responded to the 2023 survey, yielding data from 51% of the licensed shelters in the state. Based on shelter feedback last year, the Department revamped the survey presentation to improve the response rate of licensed shelters and rescues in the 2023 survey. Response rates remained low, particularly among smaller organizations, and the Department will continue to seek pathways to engage shelters and rescues in future surveys.

This year's report relies on a Live Release Rate chart to inform about all animals coming into Maine shelters. The ASPCA defines "Live Release Rate" as Live Outcomes divided by Intake. Live outcome numbers include adoptions, return to owner, return to field, transfers, and other lifesaving programs allowing animals to leave the shelter alive. Based on the shelters that responded to the survey, Maine saw a slight increase in live release rate in 2023 over 2022. Shelter intake increased by 13% in 2023 over 2022, reflecting a national trend in sheltering.

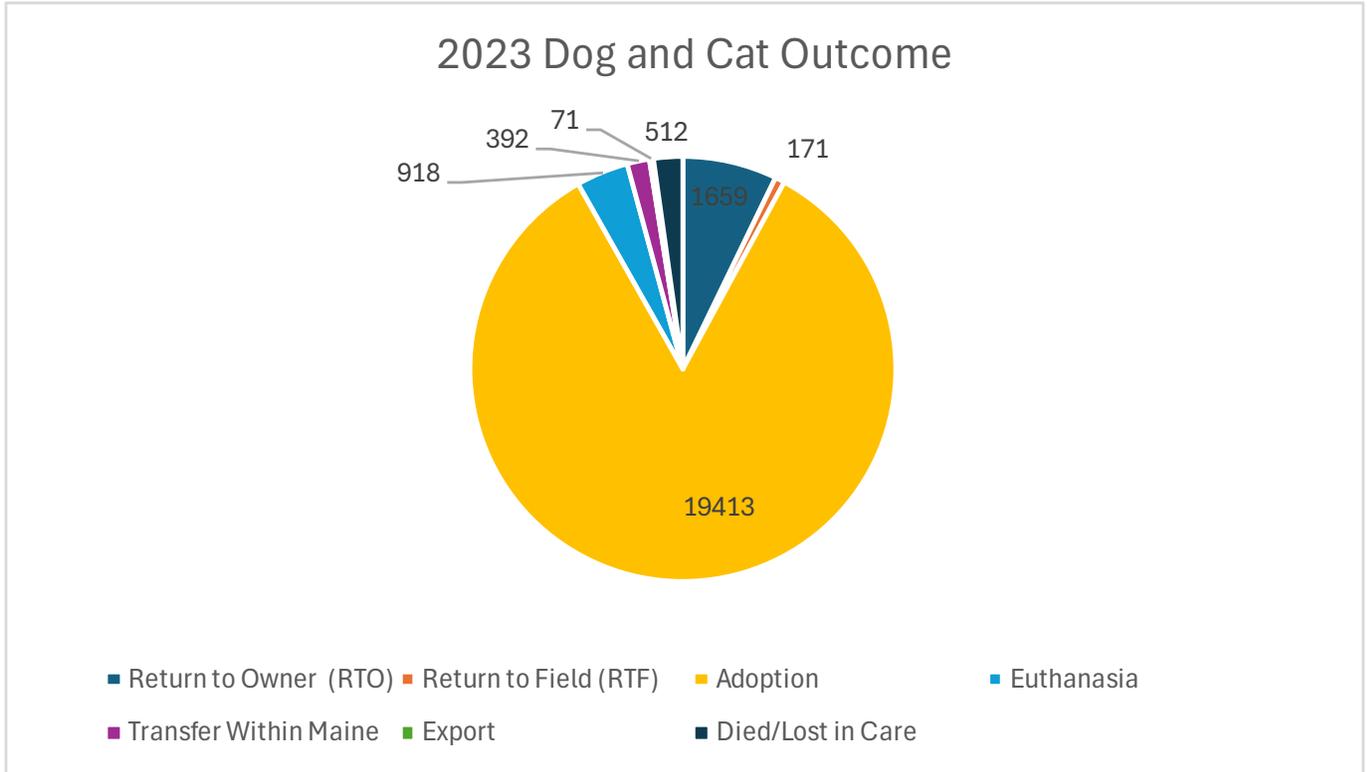


INTAKE METRICS



	Dog and Cat Intake	Dog	Cat
Stray	8627	2014	6613
Seized	198	146	52
Surrendered	8505	2147	6358
Transfer within ME	795	61	744
Import	5383	3959	1424
Born	928	151	778

ANIMAL OUTCOMES



	Animal Outcome	Dog	Cat
Return to Owner (RTO)	1659	926	733
Return to Field (RTF)	171	0	171
Adoption	19413	6490	12923
Euthanasia	918	237	681
Transfer Within Maine	392	67	325
Export	71	34	37
Died/Lost in Care	512	38	474

Licensed Animal Facilities in Maine

AWP is responsible for licensing and inspecting all animal shelters, pet stores, boarding kennels, breeding kennels, and research facilities in the State of Maine. In 2023, there were 551 of these facilities in Maine, categorized as follows:

- Animal Shelters & Rescues – 139 (+3)
- Boarding Kennels – 231 (+4)
- Breeding Kennels – 134 (-23)
- Pet Stores – 36 (no change)
- Research Facilities – 11 (-2)

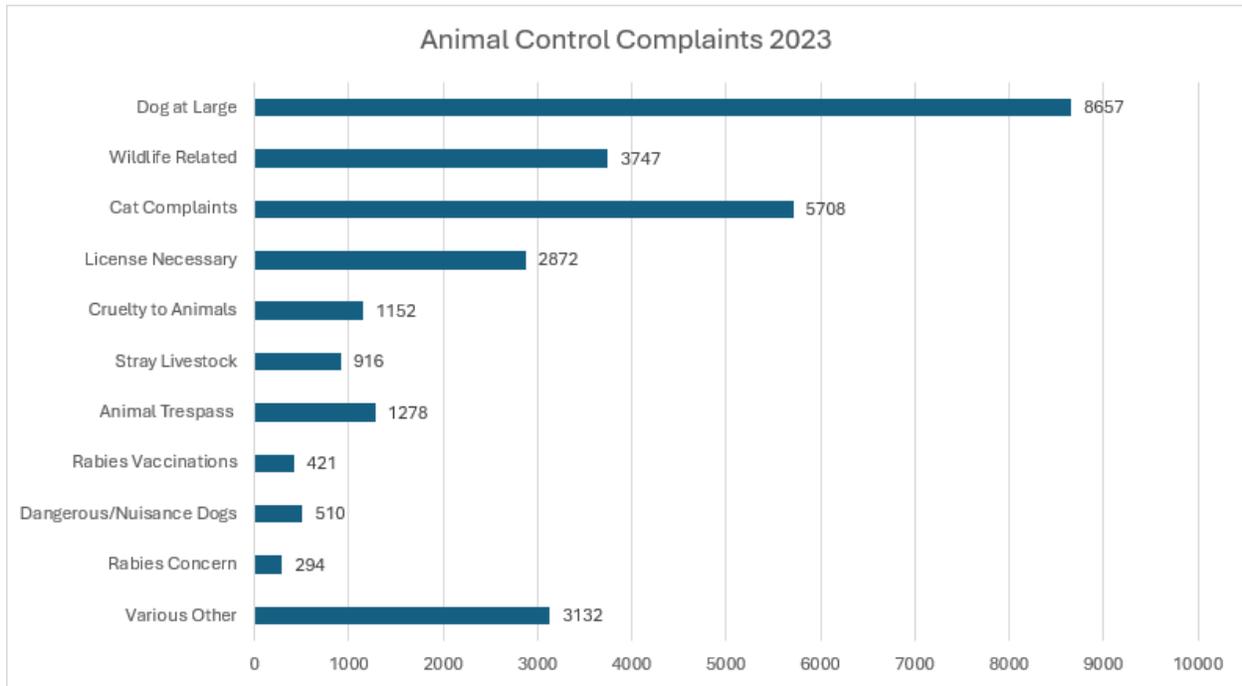
AWP Humane Agents work with these facilities to maintain compliance and prevent disease outbreaks. Our 2022 report reported that COVID-19, staffing, scheduling issues, and the number of cruelty cases contributed to slowed inspection response times. In December 2023, we filled the position of District Humane Agent-Inspections, addressing the backlog of inspections and then maintaining annual inspections for all facilities in coordination with our geographically focused District Humane Agents. Additionally, we have revised our standard operating procedures for facility scheduling and inspections to ensure a uniform approach throughout the state.

Municipal kennels have recently become the focus of a handful of impassioned complaints to AWP and AWAC. The basis of these calls or emails is often noise nuisance due to barking, dogs being housed outside and tethered to dog houses or other structures, and sometimes allegations that these are, in fact, breeding facilities that fail to obtain a state breeding facility by instead maintaining a municipal kennel license. These kennels are licensed under Chapter 721 (Dog Licenses) §3923-C; they are not state-licensed facilities. They are inspected by animal control officers and licensed by municipalities; AWP is rarely able to assist citizens in these matters as our humane agents do not have statutory authority to enter or inspect the premises without permission or a warrant. Citizens report that their complaints to towns often go uninvestigated and unresolved, expressing significant frustration with these situations and escalating their concerns to AWP and beyond. In such situations, citizens may file complaints under 7 M.R.S. §3950-A, Official Refusal or Neglect of Duty, to assert that ACOs or town officials refuse or intentionally fail to perform their statutorily required municipal animal welfare duties. Making this filing authorizes AWP to investigate whether municipalities have met their obligations. To date, one of the seven §3950-A complaints filed in 2023 was related to municipal kennel issues.

Animal Control Officer (ACO) Reporting

This is the fifth year of collecting and reporting data on ACO complaints. This information shows the different types of complaints Maine ACOs are responding to and helps AWP plan for future training and look for potential issues that need to be addressed through rule, law, or procedural changes. As with the Animal Shelter survey, the Department revamped the survey presentation and collection process for 2023 data to improve the response rate. The 2023 Animal Control Survey yielded a 52% increase in responses from Maine towns over 2022, jumping from 167 responses to 254 responses. While the gross number of complaints shown in the chart below has increased from what 2022 produced, in most cases,

these appear to correlate directly with the increase in responses: there is a 51% increase in dog complaints and a 52% increase in responses. However, this is not the case with cat complaints, which have increased by 113% over 2022. Cats have been of growing concern throughout the state over the last year; it is suspected that the pause in spay/neuter efforts during COVID-19 resulted in a backslide in population control, and we are now seeing increased numbers of cats throughout the state.



ACO Training

ACO Training was a priority for AWP in 2023. AWP teamed up with the Maine State Society for the Protection of Animals (MSSPA) to offer a daylong Equine Training for animal control officers. This 8-hour learning opportunity had a 4-hour classroom component provided both in person and via Zoom for those who could not attend in person, as well as a hands-on 4-hour element with the horses at MSSPA. Twenty-one ACOs participated in the September Equine Training. In July, AWP launched "Lunch & Learns for ACOs," an ongoing series of 1-hour online training on the last Friday of each month. Presentations on topics from Rabies to hoarding to legal paperwork and documentation have been well attended by ACOs from across the state. There has been a growing attendance at the Lunch & Learns, with the largest having 79 participants. AWP continues to offer online certification training for animal control officers, expanding the training to include all statutorily required subject matter for basic and advanced training. Online training is convenient and cost-effective for municipalities, and it provides comprehensive training in basic investigatory techniques, response to suspected rabies cases, handling calls regarding dog licensing and immunizations, and managing interactions with the public. In late 2023, AWP began working with the Midcoast Humane Society in Brunswick to offer quarterly training for new ACOs (and any ACO wanting a refresher) on dog and cat body language and using essential ACO tools. The first training occurred on March 15, 2024, with 34 participants.

AWP and AWAC worked together in 2023 to update the criteria for qualifying training to fulfill continuing education credit requirements. AWAC's ACO subcommittee spent significant time researching and developing annual training guidelines. The formal recommendations, which include five core subject areas to be completed on a three-year rotational basis and a structure for qualification of training and training hours, were made to AWP in the fall, and AWP launched implementation in January 2024. Additionally, AWP has launched a tracking process for ACO certification, which requires ACOs to submit their training information to AWP annually to ensure compliance and identify certification lapses.

Animal Welfare Advisory Council (AWAC)

In 2023, the Animal Welfare Advisory Council met ten times and provided guidance and recommendations to the AWP on numerous issues. Subcommittees focusing on legislation, investigating regionalization of animal control, animal control officer certification and training, solutions to Dog Licensing challenges, and fundraising for AWP are active. Three seats were filled in 2023, including that of an animal control officer, a cooperative extension agent or specialist, and a state animal advocacy group representative. AWP appreciates the work of the current AWAC members and looks forward to continuing to make strides together in 2024.

The AWAC members are:

1	Kim McLaughlin	Represents Municipal Interests
2	Ruthann Weist	Animal Control Officer
3	Katie Lisnik	Represents Licensed Animal Shelters
4	Frank Billings	Represents Licensed Boarding Kennels
5	Vacant	Represents Licensed Pet Shops
6	Kathleen Benard	Owner of a Pet and Represents the Interests of the Public
7	Bonnie Martinolich	An Attorney with Experience in Animal Welfare Law
8	Jessica Matulis, DVM	Veterinarian who is or has been Licensed to Practice in the State
9	Dana Hill, DVM	A Cooperative Extension Agent or Specialist
10	Casey Cole, DVM	Experience in Equine Care
11	Julie Ann Smith	Experience in Livestock Representing a Statewide Farming Organization
12	Dennis Morelli	Represents a State-based Animal Advocacy Group
13	Vacant	Holds a Kennel Licensed Issued Under Section 3923-C
14	Sharon St. John	Represents Licensed Breeding Kennels