

Coalition Support for Reforming Oregon's Animal Rescue Entity (ARE) Program HB 4034

We, the undersigned organizations, support HB 4034, legislation to reform Oregon's Animal Rescue Entity (ARE) program to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens and prevent disproportionate penalties for nonprofit animal rescues.

Under current law, animal rescue entities are subject to rigid statutory requirements that have resulted in excessive fines for technical, non-welfare paperwork violations. These penalties disproportionately impact small, nonprofit, and volunteer-run organizations—particularly in rural communities—and divert limited resources away from animal care.

HB 4034 addresses these concerns by removing overly prescriptive requirements from statute and allowing greater flexibility through administrative rules. This narrowly tailored reform reduces the risk of cumulative penalties while preserving basic standards and due process.

Animal rescues provide essential public services across Oregon.

We urge the Legislature to support this commonsense reform to ensure the ARE program is fair, workable, and does not unintentionally undermine lifesaving work.

Signed,

*Agave Dogs Rescue, Beavercreek
Animal Aid, Portland
Blue Mountain Humane Association, La Grande
Cascade Canine Rescue, East & West, Bend
Cat Adoption Team, Sherwood
Cat's Cradle Rescue, Hillsboro
Community Cat Advocacy Team, Springfield
Greenhill Humane Society, Eugene
Fences For Fido, Statewide
Friends of Felines, Keizer
Fur Love Haven, Portland
Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue, Hermiston
Harney County Save A Stray Rescue, Burns
Hazel's House Animal Rescue, Newberg
Humane Society of Cottage Grove
Indigo Rescue, Hillsboro
Kayla's Foundation
Lancaster Four Dog Rescue, Portland
Laurie's Home for Wayward Cats, Medford
Love a Pit Rescue, Winston*

*Many Miles 2 Home Rescue, Veneta
Melly Cat Rescue, Jacksonville/Rogue Valley
Meow Village, Aurora
New Beginnings SPCA, Roseburg
Northwest Animal Companions, Portland
Northwest Dog Rescue, Eugene
Oregon Dog Rescue, Portland
Oregon Friends of Shelter Animals, Hillsboro
Oregon Humane Society, Portland
Pacific Pug Rescue, Portland
Pendleton Animal Welfare Society (PAWS)
Rat Way Sanctuary, Portland
Rogue Valley Humane Society, Grants Pass
Rogue Valley Street Dogs, Talent
SNYP Spay/Neuter Clinic, Jackson County
Tucker's Cupboard, Cottage Grove
Wiggly Tails Dog Rescue, Eugene
Wildwood Farm Sanctuary, McMinnville*

Pet rescues, shelters face high fines from state

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By BERIT THORSON | East Oregonian

Oregon Department of Agriculture says penalties are the next step in the compliance pathway, but rescues say the fines seem more punitive than anything.

After about 10 years with Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue in Hermiston, Robin Barker, its vice president, is considering giving up the work she loves.

Working in animal rescue comes with certain stressors. Barker has retrieved animals from homes with dead owners' bodies in another room; she's held dying dogs on the side of the road after being hit by a car. These events, while terrible, were expected for someone who volunteers essentially full-time with an animal rescue entity.

But the kind of stress she didn't expect is receiving more than \$3,000 in fines from the state for missing details in her recordkeeping, such as lacking an address or phone number, or not including the dosage amount for a dewormer.

"We run on a shoestring budget here. We are strictly donations and fundraisers," Barker said. "We don't have excess money to be paying out stupid violations for these ridiculous things of not having completed addresses and stuff like that. That just doesn't seem very important."

Fuzz Ball isn't the only rescue organization to receive fines this year for recordkeeping violations from the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Rescues and shelters including Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter, Blue Mountain Humane Association in La Grande, Wallowa County Humane Society, and Silent Wave Horse Rescue in Kimberly all received citations and fines from the state.

"I called other rescues," said Blue Mountain Human Association Treasurer Leslie Hasse. "They've all been suffering at the hands of the Oregon Department of Agriculture."

Licensing and fees

The Department of Agriculture licenses Animal Rescue Entities across the state, per Senate Bill 883, which the 2019 Oregon Legislature passed. The law requires licensed entities to meet specific standards or face consequences including warnings, fines or removal of animals. It's similar to a health inspection for a restaurant, one animal rescue representative said.

The program started licensing and inspecting animal rescue entities in 2021, and runs on a July 1 to June 30 schedule. As of April 17, 2025, there are 184 licensed animal rescue entities in the state.

According to Andrea Cantu-Schomus, director of communications for ODA, the agency followed a multi-year compliance pathway, starting with verbal counseling before moving to written warnings, notices of violations and, this year, civil penalties.

State veterinarian Ryan Scholz enforces the program. However, some representatives of rescue entities said they never received these warnings and others think the penalties are excessive.

“None of these people that are writing these rules and citing us on it, are sitting with these animals who are dying or (are) risking getting bit, and they’re not holding them while they are euthanized,” Barker said. “We are. We’re doing this, but they’re worried about addresses, and it just pisses me off.”

ODA Director of Communications Andrea Cantu-Schomus said the goal of the civil penalties is not to be punitive but to help rescues comply with state law. The department works with rescues to reduce fines when they ask for the option and pass a follow-up inspection, she said.

“Just as we expect AREs to follow the laws in place, ODA, too, must follow the regulations that determine the pathway we must take in calculating and issuing civil penalties,” she said.

Robin Harris, treasurer at Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter, felt similarly to Barker.

The state ag department on March 7 fined PAWS \$4,270 based on 10 records with a total of 15 violations. Harris said four were for failure to provide complete location information for where an animal is being held, 10 were for incomplete dosage information on medications administered, and one was for a failure to provide import documentation on an animal that was returned to them from someone living in Washington. Of those, PAWS has all the necessary data except the import documentation.

Harris added the information didn’t print fully with the records, and when PAWS submitted records the way it did previously, the state didn’t report any issues. For example, PAWS passed its inspection on June 26, 2023, according to a copy of the report from Harris. In the report, which was reviewed July 25, 2023, the inspector noted an animal was missing a photo, but said the organization otherwise “maintains adequate records of the animals.”

Now, Harris worries about what fines will mean for PAWS. Shaindel Beers, the shelter’s vice president, said the money for the fines could be used toward helping prevent more stray pets.

“To me, everybody wants the animals to be well taken care of,” she said. “We want good record keeping, but this level of fines seems to be more punitive than in the interest of animal welfare.”

Harris added: “Because of the problems they found in those 10 records, they are requesting (all our records). If we got \$4,000 in fines on 10 records, what are they going to find on 600 records?”

Reducing fines

PAWS is hoping to pursue ways to reduce the fine. If it can't, between the fines and the shelter's \$1,125 licensing fee due to its size, Harris said the cost will equate to about a month's worth of veterinary bills. At least on the licensing fee side of things, there could be changes; some state representatives are proposing a flat rate for licensing — between \$350 and \$600, based on the type of animal rescue entity — in Senate Bill 1076.

Some shelters, including Fuzz Ball, have been successful in reducing the cost to half or even 10% of the initial fine by agreeing to resubmit new records for audit. Doing so, however, takes time and effort that many of these volunteer-run organizations often don't have.

Carol Vencill, president of the Wallowa County Humane Society in Enterprise, said the state cut its fines in half in 2024 by cooperating. However, she also said she's aware of at least one animal rescue entity that was forced to close because of ODA fines and regulations, something that shouldn't happen to the all-volunteer agencies. Vencill said she is concerned at the ODA's insistence on the rules it has in place. “There's just a lot of paperwork involved the way they want it,” she said. “It can be kind of frustrating.”

In Union County, Hasse said Blue Mountain Humane Association reduced its penalty by 90% of the initial fine. ODA had fined the organization \$1,600 for five violations — four for not including the dosage of dewormer and one for missing a phone number.

While BMHA did successfully reduce the fines, Hasse explained the organization needed to jump through hoops to do so. Blue Mountain Humane Association was required to complete another full audit and share the record of all the animals in its custody from August through April. Not only that, Hasse said, ODA picked 10 animals and gave the organization “a really short little timeline” of five days to provide the full records of those animals.

“They were getting their pound of flesh out of us instead of out of the cash drawer,” Hasse said.

Near John Day, Lisa Neuberger, director and founder of Silent Wave Horse Rescue, said the fines she received for 16 violations totaled \$2,750. “Not one (violation) has to do with the welfare of a horse or fund management,” she said.

Neuberger is one of numerous rescue representatives who mentioned the quick turnaround time on inspections. She said she didn't check her email for about 10 days, and upon logging back in, discovered she was not in compliance for failing to send in records. After asking what

the penalty was for noncompliance, she said an Oregon Department of Agriculture staff member told her, “We can shutter you.”

While Neuberger can seek a reduction to the fine, she is scared to submit incorrect information again, saying she tried to do everything right and still had 16 violations.

More than the fines themselves is the principle of penalizing rescues that are trying to comply with the law.

“We know of rescues in the state that are starving their animals,” she said. “They should be in violation and they’re not.”

Losing rescues

Barker, with Fuzz Ball, said it feels like she and other rescuers are “being punished for wanting to help animals.” Harris, with PAWS, said at first she thought the licensing program would weed out neglectful and abusive “so-called rescues,” but now she’s not sure how useful the program is.

“I thought what led to the effort to create this licensing is to make sure everybody is taking care of the animals as they need to be,” Harris said. “But I think what’s happening is those people just aren’t applying for a license, so they’re not being regulated anyway.”

Beers, with PAWS, said losing good rescues is especially detrimental now because of a national shelter crisis — there are too many animals and not enough space to house them.

“Everybody’s doing the best that they can,” she said, “and so to have punitive fines when everything is harder than ever makes it really difficult for shelters to do the work that they’re trying to do.”

Hasse called ODA immediately upon receiving the first notification that Blue Mountain Humane Association was going to be fined to see what could be done. However, she said she was told to wait until the organization received the letter of penalty.

Later, Hasse said the ag department told her BMHA could have reduced its penalty by calling earlier. She pointed out that she’d done just that. Ultimately, the organization was able to get the reduction.

ODA’s Cantu-Schomus said the regulations haven’t changed very much since the start of the program, though the process for completing inspections changed this year due to budget shortfalls. She added that requirements for records are repeatedly outlined during the entire inspection and record submission process.

Barker, with Fuzz Ball, said ODA staff seem to be available to answer questions, but people she's talked to don't understand her side of the experience. "I get that they feel this is what they need to do, but I don't think that they look at it from our side of things," she said.

The experience she's had with fines from ODA is taking its toll on Barker.

"I'm a volunteer, and it's not that I expect to be paid for it, but I am volunteering my time to do this for these animals," she said. "And I just don't think it's worth the added stress when rescue's already very stressful. It's tough to want to continue it."

— *La Grande Observer* reporter Isabella Crowley, *Wallowa County Chieftain* reporter Bill Bradshaw and *Blue Mountain Eagle* senior reporter Justin Davis contributed to this report.

Want to get involved?

Many of the animal rescues and shelters rely on volunteers and donations to operate. For more information on how to get involved or to donate, contact the organizations directly.

Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue P.O. Box 580, Hermiston, OR 97838 <https://fuzzballrescue.com>

Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter 517 SE Third St., Pendleton, OR 97801
<https://pendletonpaws.org>

Blue Mountain Humane Association 3212 Highway 30, La Grande, OR 97850
<https://bmhumane.org>

Wallowa County Humane Society P.O. Box 565, Enterprise, OR 97828
<https://wallowacountyhumanesociety.org>

Silent Wave Horse Rescue P.O. Box 484, Kimberly, OR 97848
<https://www.silentwavehorserescue.org>