

Polka Dot's Plight: Bureaucratic Missteps Threaten Foster Care Networks' Vital Role

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In the heart of America's shelters, where compassion fuels the fight to save animals, a bureaucratic shadow threatens the most vulnerable. Polka Dot, a tan mixed-breed dog, embodies the stakes of this struggle. Rescued from a neglectful situation in Georgia, her scarred body, described by veterinarians as "polka-dotted" from abuse, tells a story of survival. Yet, her journey from a Georgia shelter to a safe haven in New Hampshire reveals both the resilience of animal welfare networks and the dangers posed by misguided policies, like those from the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture (NHDOA). While the NHDOA's recent moves to restrict foster care for pregnant animals ripple across state lines, it's animals like Polka Dot, pregnant, vulnerable, and caught in a web of bureaucracy, who bear the consequences.

Polka Dot's story began when concerned neighbors in Georgia reported her dire conditions. Emaciated and covered in scars, she was confiscated by state officials and placed in a local shelter. There, staff discovered she was pregnant, a condition that sealed her fate under Georgia's strict regulations. In Georgia, pregnant animals cannot be adopted and can only be released to rescues. If local rescues are full, as they often are, these animals face euthanasia. At four weeks into her shelter stay, Polka Dot's time was running out. With no space in Georgia's overcrowded rescues, her hope rested on an extraordinary network of volunteers, including pilots who fly private planes to transport animals across state lines to safety. This multistate transport network is a lifeline for animals like Polka Dot. Volunteers, driven by compassion, coordinate complex logistics to move animals from high-kill shelters to regions with available foster homes. In Polka Dot's case, a New Hampshire rescue, Live and Let Live Farm Rescue & Sanctuary, offered a safe rescue with intentions of Polka Dot heading into a nurturing and caring foster home just in time, Volunteer co-coordinators arranged with volunteer pilots to fly her safely to NH. These unsung heroes, using their own planes and resources, navigate weather, fuel costs, and tight schedules to ensure animals reach nurturing environments. For Polka Dot, this meant a quiet foster home where she could safely deliver and nurse her puppies, far from the stress of previous animal cruelty and a crowded and noisy shelter environment.

Her story underscores the power of this network, which saves thousands of animals annually by bridging gaps between overburdened shelters and compassionate fosters. Yet, this lifeline is under threat. In New Hampshire, the NHDOA has launched a campaign that jeopardizes pregnant animals like Polka Dot. By attempting to reclassify pregnancy as a non-medical condition, the department seeks to bar pregnant dogs and cats from foster homes, forcing them into shelter kennels ill-equipped for their needs. The Concord Monitor recently exposed this policy in its September 2025, article, *"What's best for the animal': State claws back foster care, shelters warn of danger to mothers and newborns"* (link available at <https://www.liveandletlivefarm.org>). The article highlighted cases like Sun, a pregnant cat found

in the edge of the woods in NH, who was denied foster care and left to whelp in a noisy, cramped shelter cage. For Polka Dot, such a policy could have been deadly. Pregnant animals require specialized care, proper nutrition, reduced stress, and close monitoring, best provided in foster homes. Veterinary science confirms pregnancy is a medical condition, with risks like dystonia or malnutrition threatening mothers and their litters. Shelters, often stretched thin with space and resources, struggle to provide this care, and space constraints frequently lead to euthanasia for pregnant animals. The NHDOA's policy, rooted in baseless claims, dismisses these realities. The department suggests, without evidence, that shelters and rescues misuse foster homes to "increase facility capacity" rather than to save lives. This accusation ignores the realities of animal welfare. Foster homes are not mere extensions of shelters; they are sanctuaries where animals like Polka Dot receive one-on-one attention, socialization, and care that shelters, with limited staff and resources, cannot provide. For pregnant animals, foster homes reduce stress, which is critical for healthy deliveries. Studies show that high stress in shelters can lead to complications, weaker litters, and higher disease susceptibility, especially for newborns vulnerable to illnesses like parvovirus or upper respiratory infections. By restricting foster care, the NHDOA condemns animals to environments where their survival and that of their unborn is at risk.

Polka Dot's scars tell a story of past cruelty, but her journey to a foster home speaks to human kindness. After her rescue and completing her medical needs and requirements, she was flown 1,000 miles by volunteer pilots who donate their time and aircraft to transport animals. These flights, often coordinated through organizations like Pilots N Paws, and Seuk's Army, involve meticulous planning, checking weather, securing landing permissions, and ensuring animals are comfortable. For Polka Dot, the flight meant escaping a death sentence. In New Hampshire, her foster home provides a warm bed, nutritious food, and the calm she needs to prepare for motherhood. Her puppies, to be born in a caring and safe environment, will have a chance at life and then to socially prepare for adoption, a future that would have been impossible without the transport network and foster care system.

The NHDOA's policy threatens to unravel this system. By redefining pregnancy to exclude it from foster care eligibility, the department bypasses New Hampshire's laws and rules, which allow animals with medical needs like pregnancy to be placed in foster homes. This move lacks legislative approval, raising questions about its legality. More importantly, it ignores the moral imperative to protect vulnerable animals. Shelters across the country rely on foster networks to save animals like Polka Dot, especially when local resources are strained. In Georgia, where Polka Dot faced euthanasia, the lack of foster space is a daily reality. New Hampshire's willingness to accept out-of-state animals has long been a beacon of hope, but the NHDOA's actions could dim that light, leaving animals to suffer or die in overcrowded shelters.

The broader implications are chilling. The NHDOA's claim that shelters import animals to "stay afloat" misrepresents the mission of rescues, which prioritize saving lives over arbitrary borders. Polka Dot's rescue was not about "capacity" but about compassion. The department's suggestion

that successful spay and neuter programs reduce the need for fosters ignores the ongoing crisis in states like Georgia, where overpopulation and limited resources persist. By attacking foster care, the NHDOA undermines the national network that saved Polka Dot, threatening the delicate balance of transport and foster systems that give animals a second chance. For animals, the consequences are stark. Picture a pregnant dog like Polka Dot, heavy with puppies, confined to a shelter kennel. The noise, the lack of space, and the absence of individualized care increase her stress, risking her health and her litter's survival. Newborns in shelters face heightened risks of disease. Foster homes, with their quiet environments and attentive caregivers, mitigate these risks, offering mothers like Polka Dot the best chance to deliver healthy babies. Denying them this care is not just a policy failure; it's a betrayal of the animals we've pledged to protect.

Polka Dot's story is a testament to what's possible when compassion drives action. From Georgia's shelter to New Hampshire rescue's foster home, her journey was made possible by a network of volunteers, neighbors who reported her abuse, shelter staff who cared for her, pilots who flew her to safety, and willing rescues and fosters who opened their hearts and homes. This network, replicated across the country, saves countless animals each year. Yet, policies like the NHDOA's threaten to dismantle it, leaving animals to face uncertainty or worse. For every Polka Dot who makes it, countless others wait, their fates hanging on the whims of bureaucracy.

As a nation, we must champion the systems that save animals like Polka Dot and Sun. The transport network, with its volunteer pilots and dedicated rescuers, is a model of what compassion can achieve. Foster homes are not just a stopgap; they are a lifeline, ensuring that pregnant animals receive the care they need to thrive. NHDOA's overreach, with its baseless assumptions and disregard for animal welfare, endangers this system. We cannot let bureaucracy triumph over compassion. Polka Dot's scars remind us of the cruelty animals endure; her survival reminds us of the hope we can offer. Let's protect the networks that give animals like her a chance at life.

You can find links to Concord Monitor articles and more information on the Bureaucratic over reach at the website: Liveandletlivefarm.org