

Assembly Bill 1999

Improve Access to Veterinary Care

Assemblymember Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

Assembly Bill (AB) 1999 implements several provisions that will protect the health of domestic animals and improve access to care from qualified veterinary professionals. Specifically, the bill creates streamlined pathways for retired volunteers and out-of-state veterinarians to join shelter veterinary care teams and reduces regulatory inefficiencies that may unnecessarily increase veterinary staff workload. In doing these things, AB 1999 provides the state with more tools to address its ongoing veterinary care shortage.

BACKGROUND

In 2024, the California State Legislature passed ACR 86 (Kalra, Chapter 51, Statutes of 2024), which encouraged the state to address the pet overpopulation crisis by supporting high-volume spay-and-neuter services and filling critical staffing gaps with out-of-state licensed veterinary professionals. Unfortunately, despite the state's efforts to meet these goals, there are still not enough veterinary services available to meet the needs of shelters and private pet owners. Furthermore, the services that do exist are often made less accessible by cumbersome statutes. These issues are felt most acutely by animal shelters, of which [25% lack adequate veterinary staffing and 64% cannot meet their animals' basic medical needs](#).

The impacts of staffing shortages are exacerbated by inefficient statutes, which further reduce existing veterinary staff's limited capacity. Currently, California is one of only two states that still require a veterinarian to re-establish the Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) every time a pet owner seeks treatment for their animal. This means that a veterinarian must examine a pet prior to providing any prescription or recommended course of action, even if they already know the animal and its medical history well enough to provide effective guidance for minor issues over the phone or through a messaging platform. While this

inconveniences all pet owners, it distinctly disadvantages low-income owners who often lack the time, transportation, and financial resources to facilitate frequent veterinary visits.

Regulatory impediments aside, animals also suffer from the breadth of the existing owner exemption. This exemption allows animal owners or their unpaid agents to perform various medical procedures on their animals, including surgeries. Because most animal owners have not received a veterinary education, they are unable to safely perform these high-risk procedures, causing needless animal suffering.

SOLUTION

AB 1999 improves access to veterinary care by:

- Creating a "retired volunteer" status for veterinarians and RVTs who wish to provide unpaid, voluntary labor to animal shelters and humane societies.
- Creating a streamlined pathway for out-of-state veterinarians to become licensed "shelter veterinarians".
- Reforming VCPR statute to allow veterinarians to provide care without re-establishing an existing VCPR.

This bill also clarifies veterinary telemedicine statute and narrows the scope of the owner exemption to exclude surgical procedures.

SPONSORS

California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA)
California Veterinary Medical Board (VMB)
San Diego Humane Society
Social Compassion in Legislation (SCIL)

CONTACT

Marissa Plante, Legislative Aide
Marissa.Plante@asm.ca.gov
(916) 319-2025