

SB 390 Provision of Veterinary Services - Routine Medical Care and Rabies Vaccines Favorable with Amendments

Thank you for taking the time to review my written testimony. I am Dr. Elizabeth Hepner and I'm a small animal veterinarian currently practicing in Middle River, Maryland. I feel this bill is unnecessary and worse, may cause unintended negative consequences for the people, pets and wildlife of Maryland. Under these provisions, this bill would allow individuals from other states to practice veterinary medicine in Maryland to provide "routine services". This includes exams, vaccinations, spaying/neutering and health certificates. My concerns include regulation of individuals coming from other states, gaps in continuity of rabies vaccination and appropriate follow up for our patients.

This legislation would allow individuals to come in to practice veterinary medicine in Maryland for an unspecified amount of time. Currently, veterinarians are required to pass national licensing exam (the NAVLE) and then hold a state license where they intend to practice. This state licensure holds all licensed individuals to the standards of their state practice act and this varies from state to state. There is no overlap between states. If a practitioner comes from another state, and then returns, there are no regulatory bodies to hold them accountable for the work they performed in Maryland. If they are not licensed in our state, there is no capacity for oversight or discipline if complications or malpractice occurs. Furthermore, what incentive do Maryland veterinarians have to hold a license in Maryland if they can practice without one and in addition, not be held to any regulations or disciplinary action?

Thorough and appropriate vaccination of our pet populations is an integral part of safe guarding human health. There are many zoonotic diseases that can be passed from people to animal and vice versa but rabies is one that is invariably fatal, meaning once symptoms start, death will occur. Each year, rabies causes about 60,000 deaths worldwide but we see much fewer rabies related illness in the US due to our vaccination efforts. Our efforts are fruitful because we have an effective vaccine that is appropriately administered and properly recorded and monitored. Currently, only licensed veterinarians can administer rabies vaccines and complete rabies vaccination certificates as proof of rabies vaccination. If the ability to administer rabies vaccines is widened to less qualified individuals, this will allow for more chances for the vaccine to be given inappropriately, therefore, rendering it ineffective and leaving pets and humans at risk for infection and make it more difficult to record and track appropriate vaccination status which is integral in prevention of rabies.

Finally, while spays and neuters are considered routine, they are not without risk and potential complications. A spay is still an abdominal surgery and any anesthetic event carries with it some risk. There are no provisions in this bill on duration of work in Maryland or mention of follow up care for their surgical patients. Complications can arise during the procedure but also several days post operation and can include mild events from a suture site reaction to dehiscence of their surgical site or bleeding that can be life threatening. With the surgeon having left to go back out of state, then this would put undue stress and strain on current Maryland veterinarians who are already busy caring for their own patients. Follow up on cases like this makes it difficult to have continuity of care and allows for the quality of medical care received to suffer due to confusion on post op care.

Access to veterinary care should never compromise the standard of care. Taking this unprecedented step to allow unregulated veterinarians to practice in our state is dangerous. Shelter animals deserve more. For these reasons, I urge that SB 390 be amended to remove all provisions related to the Agriculture Article.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Hepner, DVM, MPH