



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: February 15, 2023

BILL NUMBER: HB 325

SHORT TITLE: PROVISION OF VETERINARY SERVICES- ROUTINE MEDICAL CARE AND RABIES VACCINES

MDA POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

HB 325 would alter the contents of Agriculture Article, § 2–304 and create Agriculture Article § 2–305.1, as well as alter the General Health Article § 18-313. The changes to the Agriculture Article would require the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (SBVME) to allow veterinarians that are not licensed in the State of Maryland to practice veterinary medicine in a limited capacity using their license from another jurisdiction. It would also move a portion of the Agriculture Article §2–304 to the newly created section, §2–305.1. The General Health Article would be altered to allow any individual working for an animal hospital or animal control facility to be able to administer a rabies vaccination.

The SBVME is charged with protecting the public and animal health by administering the Maryland Veterinary Practice Act and adopting regulations that promote the safe and competent practice of veterinary medicine, veterinary technology, and sanitary and safe physical conditions at veterinary facilities. The SBVME licenses and registers veterinarians, registers veterinary technicians (RVTs), and licenses veterinary hospitals and animal facilities to carry out its mission. It conducts inspections of licensed veterinary hospitals, reviews complaints filed by members of the public against licensees, and, where necessary, pursues disciplinary actions when licensed professionals do not meet established standards. Licensure and registration ensure that veterinarians and veterinary technicians are qualified, engage in regular professional development, and are subject to the SBVME's authority to investigate and pursue disciplinary actions.

The SBVME and the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) have coordinated with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to review the proposed changes to the Health Article. While the Board generally believes that the safest approach to rabies vaccination would allow only licensed and registered veterinarians to administer rabies vaccines, its members understand

the concerns raised by animal control staff and members of the public about access to care. Accordingly, the SBVME supports MDH's proposed amendment that would allow RVTs, who have the background, training, professionalism, and familiarity with the legal standard for practicing veterinary medicine to administer rabies vaccines under the supervision of a veterinarian.

As to the level of veterinary supervision to be required, the SBVME supports MDH's amendments creating two different standards for RVTs administering rabies vaccines, depending on whether the RVT is working at a veterinary hospital, as defined in § 2-304.1 of the Agriculture Article or for an Animal Control Facility as defined in § 2-305 of the Agriculture Article. The proposed standard for veterinary supervision of RVTs working for Animal Control Facilities is less direct, reducing delays for vaccination of animals at Animal Control Facilities and allowing animals to be placed in homes more quickly.

The SBVME urges that HB325 be further amended to remove all proposed changes to the Agriculture Article. While the SBVME and MDA understand the calls for increased access to veterinary services for constituents and animal shelters within the state, the SBVME cannot support any measure that would allow veterinarians who do not possess a current Maryland veterinary license to practice in the state. Removing the licensing requirement for certain veterinarians undermines the ability of the SBVME to effectively enforce the standards of veterinary medicine set in place by the Veterinary Practice Act and its associated regulations.

The SBVME appreciates the efforts of the bill sponsors to address complaints about timely access to veterinary care in this state. We are ready and willing to be part of discussions about the current landscape for obtaining and providing veterinary services and the extent to which adjustments are necessary to expand the pool of licensed veterinarians practicing in Maryland and increase access to care. However, we should not lose sight of our shared goal of promoting the welfare of animals in this State. Increasing access to veterinary care should not come with lower standards that compromise patient safety and oversight of the profession. Due to concerns about upholding high standards of professional practice and patient care, the SBVME supports HB 325 with these amendments.

Thank you for your consideration of a favorable request with amendments.

If you have additional questions, please contact Steve Connelly, Deputy Secretary, at steve.connelly@maryland.gov or (410) 841-5881.