



**HUMANE
RESCUE
ALLIANCE**
Animals. People. Community.

February 15, 2023

Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen St
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 325 Provision of Veterinary Services - Routine Medical Care and Rabies Vaccines

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Honorable Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the Humane Rescue Alliance and our supporters in Maryland, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB325, legislation to proactively address the care gap for Maryland pets caused by the national veterinary shortage, relieve pressure on strained animal sheltering organizations, and promote public health.

The Humane Rescue Alliance honors more than 150 years of commitment to protecting animals, supporting families, and advocating for positive change to create a world where all animals can thrive. We are the largest animal services provider in our region, touching the lives of over 100,000 animals annually through adoption, community veterinary care and other support services, and lost pet reunification. Last year, we helped over 4,000 Maryland families find their new animal companions.

While our physical sheltering facilities are in Washington, DC and New Jersey, my work as our National Alliance Medical Advisor focuses on national and regional partnerships and animal transports. This work includes supporting our partners throughout Maryland, from Frederick County down to St. Mary's, and helping move pets when facilities are crowded into new markets for adoption.

I became licensed in Maryland, in addition to my existing DC veterinary licensure, in large part because I was constantly seeing the animals in our partner facilities bottleneck in the journey to their new homes waiting for routine veterinary care, forcing animals to stay in shelters for longer and putting additional strain on Maryland's public animal shelters.

There is a well-documented veterinary shortage across the United States. A recent national study from the largest veterinary provider in the country, estimates that by 2030 there will be 15,000 fewer veterinarians than are needed to care for the nation's pets, leaving as many as 75 million people without veterinary care. When many of the animal shelters in our state already do not have a veterinarian on staff and have to wait for volunteer visiting veterinarians to perform routine care, the issue of ensuring medical care for our community's homeless pets can only become more challenging.

This is why proactively addressing the need for routine veterinary care is of essential interest to the community and to public health. We must not allow unnecessary delays in vaccination to hold animals hostage in our state's animal shelters when there are viable and proven solutions to free up veterinarian and sheltering resources. Unfortunately, animals held at shelters waiting to go to the veterinarian quickly becomes an unsustainable issue as shelters run out of kennel space, leading to issues of shelter overcrowding. Ultimately, lack of access to veterinary care means shelters have no choice but to limit community safety net services, intake prevention, adoptions, and foster programs.

I come from a career of working in animal shelters in North Carolina and Washington, DC where care staff are permitted to administer rabies vaccinations. It is heartbreaking to me to hear from our partners in Maryland about having to wait two weeks for a volunteer visiting veterinarian to come and administer vaccines so that an animal can move out of the shelter when there are other options. I have personally taught staff how to administer vaccinations without issue, as is allowed in 15 states and the District of Columbia, where rabies vaccines may be administered by non-veterinarians (Of the 40 states that require rabies vaccinations, the following states allow for non-veterinarians to administer rabies vaccination: Alabama, Alaska, DC, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin).

We must not allow unnecessary delays in vaccination to put in jeopardy all of the good work that has been done to improve our shelter outcomes when there are viable and proven solutions to proactively provide services to the community. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report for HB 325.

Megan McAndrew, DVM
National Alliance Medical Advisor