

SUPPORT SB 1040 (Bradley) HB 849 (Killebrew) The Providing Equity in Telehealth Services ("P.E.T.S.") Act

THE ISSUE

Physicians use telehealth as an additional tool to establish new doctor-patient relationships via telehealth in all 50 states, even for nonverbal children.¹ Since 2018, the American Association of Veterinary State Boards has supported new veterinary-client-patient-relationship establishment via telehealth "consistent with regulations...that permit physicians to establish relationships with human patients remotely, no face-to-face visit required."² However, outdated and unnecessary Florida regulation requiring an in-person physical examination as a gateway to veterinary care is blocking veterinarians from fully using telehealth.

Veterinary telehealth can be an especially vital tool for senior citizens with pets, working families, and those who face challenges accessing pet care due to disability, transportation issues, or because they live in rural or urban communities underserved by veterinarians. Telehealth is useful for potentially aggressive or fearful pets, specialty care, terminal disease management, hospice care, and more. A physical examination may not be necessary in many situations, such as fleas, ear mites, initial assessment of certain gastrointestinal and skin issues, and more.

Research by a former Dean of the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine found that 75 million pets in the U.S. could be without veterinary care by 2030.³ Expanding access to veterinary virtual care can help alleviate the strain on veterinary healthcare exacerbated by the ongoing critical shortage of veterinary professionals in the workforce and may lower the number of animals surrendered to overburdened animal shelters and reduce instances of veterinary medical neglect.

A December 23, 2023, Mason-Dixon poll found overwhelming bipartisan public support (89%) for expanding legal options for veterinarians and pet owners to use telehealth.

EXISTING LAW

Florida law does not address veterinary telehealth. Under outdated regulations stipulating that vets must have "recent contact" with an animal before vets can provide treatment—a provision that is not required by statute⁴—Florida's licensed veterinarians are reluctant to use telehealth in many cases out of concern they will be disciplined by the Board of Veterinary Medicine and could lose their licenses unless they examine animal patients in person, even in situations where telehealth can be effectively used and the best option for the pet and owner.

THE PROPOSAL

Modeled on Florida's proven human telehealth provider statute, this bill expands access to safe, convenient veterinary telehealth for veterinarians and for pet owners across the economic and geographic spectrum by enabling Florida-licensed veterinarians, practicing within a prevailing veterinary quality of care and under the oversight of the Florida Board of Veterinary Medicine, to use telehealth technology. The bill prohibits controlled substance telehealth prescribing and enables veterinarians to indirectly supervise the administration of rabies vaccinations by animal control agencies for animals in their custody.

SUPPORT

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)
Florida Animal Protection and Advocacy Association
Florida Association of Animal Welfare Organizations
Veterinary Virtual Care Association
Animal Policy Group
Coalition for the Veterinary Professional Associate

¹ <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2018-10/ama-chart-telehealth-patient-physician-relationship.pdf>

² <https://www.aavsb.org/Download?url=s/zvw7kz187dic8zu/Guidelines%20for%20Telehealth.pdf>

³ <https://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/75-million-pets-may-lose-access-to-care-by-2030/>

⁴ Compare F.A.C. 61G18-30.001 (1)(y) & F.S.S. 474.214 (1)(y)