

SUPPORT SB 1038 (Bradley) HB 1245 (Killebrew) The Veterinary Workforce Innovation Act

THE ISSUE

Veterinary medicine is experiencing an ongoing, critical shortage of veterinarians and other veterinary professionals in the workforce. Research by a former Dean of the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. James Lloyd, DVM, Ph.D., found that 75 million pets in the U.S. could be without veterinary care by 2030.¹ This veterinary shortage has made it harder for Florida pet owners to get appointments and has led to emergency hospitals closing or curtailing their hours. The shortage is particularly acute in rural areas and animal shelter medicine.

This veterinary shortage is exacerbating other underlying problems that impact the ability of Floridians to access veterinary care. Many Florida pet owners face serious barriers to care, including financial, logistical, and geographic barriers. According to federal government data, the cost of veterinary care has skyrocketed, rising 10% annually.² As a result of these combined factors, more than one third of pets in the U.S. do not receive regular veterinary care.³

These problems call for innovative policy solutions. Creating a veterinary “PA” position can help increase access to veterinary care for Florida families, benefits that include the following:

- alleviate the strain on veterinary healthcare exacerbated by the shortage,
- provide more veterinary career options,
- lower the costs of care,
- extend more care to rural and underserved areas,
- lower the number of animals surrendered to overburdened animal shelters, and more.

A December 2023 Mason-Dixon Florida public opinion poll found **90% of registered Florida voters support** a state law establishing the Veterinary Professional Associate profession, enabling people with a master’s degree in veterinary care to perform routine check-ups, diagnosis, procedures, and treatments while under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian.

EXISTING LAW

A master’s degree in veterinary clinical care recently has become available to enable a veterinary “P.A.” role that can help address the shortage of veterinarians, decrease the cost of care, and expand access to high need spay/neuter and other common procedures, yet Florida law does not currently recognize a veterinary professional associate and restricts any practice of veterinary medicine, including routine situations and procedures, to licensed veterinarians only.

THE PROPOSAL

Based on Florida’s proven physician assistant statute, “The Veterinary Workforce Innovation Act,” provides title protection for veterinary professional associates with a Master’s degree in veterinary clinical care; authorizes veterinary professional associates to perform veterinary tasks under the supervision by a veterinarian, with the exception of prescribing medications or performing surgeries other than common spay/neuter and dental surgeries; and provides for veterinarian oversight, discretion, and liability.

SUPPORT

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)

Florida Animal Protection & Advocacy Association
Florida Association of Animal Welfare Organizations
Coalition for the Veterinary Professional Associate

¹ Lloyd, James W. “Pet Healthcare in the US: Are there Enough Veterinarians? Animal Health Economics, LLC. See: <https://www.marsveterinary.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Characterizing-the-Need.pdf> & https://www.marsveterinary.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Characterizing%20the%20Need%20-%20DVM%20-%20FINAL_2.24.pdf

² <https://apnews.com/article/inflation-health-economy-prices-pets-5e6ab45eb6e3e316a89158bb630a9835> & <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cpi.t02.htm>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7143178/>