



SCIL
Social Compassion
in Legislation

January 4, 2023

The Honorable Christina Bradbury
President
California Veterinary Medical Board
1747 N. Market Blvd., Ste. 230
Sacramento, CA 95834-2978

RE: Legislative Proposal to Allow Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVTs) to Perform Male Cat Sterilization Surgeries Under the Direct Supervision of a California Licensed Veterinarian

Dear President Bradbury and Board Members:

There is a pet overpopulation crisis in California and throughout the nation, and the most effective way to combat it is to increase sterilization rates.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many Californians adopted animals from shelters, but unfortunately many more decided to buy from breeders. As demand increased, many saw an economic opportunity and started breeding animals for the first time, causing supply to far outpace demand.

Over this same period, it became more difficult to access affordable and timely veterinarian care. Contributing factors included a systemic lack of access to veterinary education, a mental health crisis in the veterinary profession that pushed some to leave the industry, cost pressures due to inflation, and corporate consolidation of veterinary practices.

This lack of access to veterinary care prevented the spaying or neutering of thousands of animals, which only exacerbated the pet overpopulation problem.

A 2021 national survey showed that 14 California counties ranked in the bottom 25% on the Veterinary Care Accessibility Score. The overall score for California was 47 out of 100, with the Central Valley and Northern California scoring the lowest. By comparison, Nebraska has a score of 71.

We will never be able to adopt our way out of the current overpopulation crisis. The only sustainable solution is to increase access to veterinary care, specifically spay and neuter surgeries in shelters and private practice. One action that will produce immediate results is to allow RVTs to perform male cat neuter surgeries under the direct supervision of a California

Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), thereby freeing up more time for DVMs to focus on complex spay and neuter surgeries.

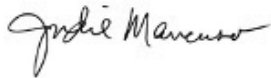
RVTs are already authorized to administer anesthesia for sterilization surgeries, which is widely viewed as the “riskiest” part of a cat neuter procedure. They are also allowed to perform dental extractions, a more complicated procedure than cat neuters. Current regulation states that “direct supervision” requires the DVM to direct the actions of the supervised RVT. This means that a DVM will control when and if an RVT performs these surgeries.

This modest proposal will not fix the pet overpopulation crisis on its own, but it will help to alleviate the problem, particularly in shelter settings and high-volume spay and neuter clinics.

Below is a copy of our sponsored ACR 86 (Kalra), the Pet Overpopulation Crisis Response Act, which goes into more detail as to why we are bringing this proposal forward at this time. The resolution has already passed three committees and an Assembly floor vote, all unanimously, and will go to the full Senate within the next month.

Social Compassion in Legislation urges the VMB to join us in crafting this timely legislation, which will save animals’ lives.

My deepest gratitude,



Judie Mancuso
VMB Public Member, 2010-2018
President/CEO/Founder
Social Compassion in Legislation

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 86, as amended, Kalra. Animals: overpopulation: spay and neutering services.

This measure would encourage the state and local municipalities to develop and fund high-volume spay and neuter clinics across the state to provide sterilization services, and would encourage other actions relating to pets, including actions to control animal breeding and encourage spaying and neutering as specified.

DIGEST KEY

Fiscal Committee: yes

BILL TEXT

WHEREAS, There is a pet overpopulation crisis in California; and

WHEREAS, California's private and public shelters and the private rescue organizations that support them are overwhelmed with animals; and

WHEREAS, California's private and public shelters are chronically underfunded while tasked with tackling many of the state's animal needs, such as fighting animal abuse, addressing mental health issues, *including* hoarding, providing safekeeping for pets when owners are arrested or placed in the hospital, supporting public safety, *including* rabies control, assisting first responders during emergencies and natural disasters, reunifying pets with their people, and providing life-impacting veterinary interventions and care, animal behavioral support, and adoptions; and

WHEREAS, Due to breeding and lack of access to spaying and neutering services, the state's shelters are experiencing overcrowding, leading to higher rates of illness, euthanasia, and operational hardships; and

WHEREAS, Due to shelter overcrowding, shelters are turning away animals from intake, leading to higher rates of animals procreating and struggling to survive on the streets; and

WHEREAS, There has been an influx of rabbits, horses, pigs, and other agricultural animals into shelters whose higher level of care puts further strain on shelter resources; and

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges that shelters face due to shelter closures or highly reduced hours, staffing shortages, and functional interruptions; and

WHEREAS, Californians adopted pets at record numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic and many Californians underestimated the time that was needed to care for pets and then returned to work, leading to higher rates of owner relinquishment; and

WHEREAS, Due to the brief spike in demand for pets during the pandemic, many Californians, seeing an economic opportunity, began breeding dogs for monetary gain, thereby contributing to the pet overpopulation crisis; and

WHEREAS, Californians are currently not adopting pets from shelters and rescues at the level needed; and

WHEREAS, Californians are buying unaltered "purebred" animals from both in-state and out-of-state breeders; and

WHEREAS, There is a shortage of pet-friendly housing in California, leading to increased owner relinquishment; and

WHEREAS, Due to the pandemic, veterinary clinics and shelters were not able to perform routine spay and neuter surgeries, which has resulted in more unwanted litters; and

WHEREAS, There is insufficient community access to low-cost or free spay and neuter clinics, as well as a lack of resources needed to fully enforce state and local laws concerning licensing, breeding, spaying, and neutering; and

WHEREAS, There is a lack of affordable veterinary services available to Californians and their companion animals, which contributes to animal suffering and increased owner relinquishments; and

WHEREAS, There are only two veterinary schools in California, both with limited seating, which fail to meet the state's demand for licensed veterinarians, and there are not enough academic faculty at those institutions to teach veterinary students; and

WHEREAS, There are not enough licensed veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians, particularly those trained to perform high-volume spay and neuter surgeries, to meet the service demands of California's shelters, leading to shelter animals being adopted unaltered, thus adding to the pet overpopulation crisis; and

WHEREAS, There is a mental health crisis among veterinarians and shelter and rescue volunteers and staff due to occupational stress, leading to reported suicide rates four to five times higher than the general population; and

WHEREAS, Local jurisdictions spend over \$400,000,000 per year in operating the state's shelters to house, adopt out, and euthanize homeless animals; and

WHEREAS, The only annual state funding for shelters is the roughly \$500,000 allocated through the Pet Lover's Fund funded by the Pet Lover's specialized license plates program, and a tax check-off program for low-cost spay and neuter; and

WHEREAS, Millions of private and philanthropic dollars are spent every year to assist California's shelter animals; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature has failed to appropriate ongoing funds to carry out the mandates of Senate Bill 1785 (Chapter 752 of the Statutes of 1998), authored by Senator Tom Hayden; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Veterinary Medical Board, with support from the Governor, other state boards and agencies, and interested stakeholders, should encourage out-of-state licensed veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians to become licensed in California to perform or assist with the necessary spay and neuter surgeries and other medical services in order to address pet overpopulation; and be it further

Resolved, That the state and local municipalities, in cooperation with public and private shelters, nonprofit rescue organizations, and private foundations, are encouraged to develop and fund high-volume spay and neuter clinics across the state to provide sterilization services; and be it further

Resolved, That allocation of adequate funding for statewide spay and neuter programs and resources for broader enforcement of state and local licensing, breeding, and spay and neuter laws is urgently needed; and be it further

Resolved, That the state is encouraged to conduct a public relations campaign urging Californians to adopt shelter animals rather than buying an animal from a breeder, and to always spay and neuter them; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

An act to amend Section 4840.2 of, and to add Section 4840.3 to, the Business and Professions Code, relating to veterinary medicine.

SECURED
COPY



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THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 4840.2 of the Business and Professions Code is amended to read:

4840.2. Registered veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants shall not perform the following health care services:

- (a) ~~Surgery.~~ Surgery, except as provided in Section 4840.3.
- (b) Diagnosis and prognosis of animal diseases.
- (c) Prescribing of drugs, medicine, and appliances.

SEC. 2. Section 4840.3 is added to the Business and Professions Code, to read:

4840.3. (a) For purposes of this section, "veterinarian" means a California-licensed veterinarian.

(b) Notwithstanding any other law, a registered veterinary technician may perform neuter surgery on a male domestic cat under the direct supervision of a veterinarian only if both of the following conditions are met:

- (1) The registered veterinary technician reviews the animal patient's history in order to reasonably ensure that the neuter surgery is appropriate.
- (2) The registered veterinary technician performs the neuter surgery in accordance with written protocols and procedures established by the veterinarian.



LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

Bill No.

as introduced, _____.

General Subject: Veterinary medicine: registered veterinary technicians.

Existing law, the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act, provides for the licensure and registration of veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians and the regulation of the practice of veterinary medicine by the Veterinary Medical Board. Existing law permits registered veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants to carry out specified acts in the veterinary care and treatment of animals, and authorizes the board to regulate the veterinary care activities of registered veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants, including prohibiting registered veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants from performing surgery.

This bill would authorize a registered veterinarian technician to perform neuter surgery on a male domestic cat under the direct supervision of a California-licensed veterinarian, as specified.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes. State-mandated local program: no.

