

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1999 (Kalra)

As Amended March 19, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Amends the "owner exemption" in the California Veterinary Medicine Practice Act (Practice Act); establishes "shelter veterinarian", "retired veterinarian" and "retired volunteer veterinarian" license categories and associated fees; clarifies terminology related to the practice of veterinary medicine via telemedicine; clarifies that the veterinary-client-patient relationship (VCPR) can be established on an annual basis; and requires specified information related to corporate ownership disclosures when renewing a veterinary premises registration.

Major Provisions

- 1) Narrows the "owner exemption" to specify that owners cannot perform any surgical or dental operation upon their animal.
- 2) Establishes a "shelter veterinarian" license category that is subject to substantially similar application requirements as a standard veterinarian license, except as specified.
- 3) Authorizes the California Veterinary Medical Board (CVMB) to charge specified fees related to shelter veterinarian licenses.
- 4) Establishes a "retired status" for veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians (RVTs) and authorizes the CVMB to charge an associated fee between \$25 and \$50.
- 5) Authorizes the CVMB to charge a fee for restoring a license or registration from retired status to active status between \$50 and \$100.
- 6) Establishes a "retired volunteer status" for veterinarians and RVTs to volunteer services at animal shelters, subject to certain continuing education requirements, and authorizes the CVMB to charge specified fees.
- 7) Includes definitions and updates terminology.
- 8) Revises requirements related to the establishment and maintenance of a VCPR to clarify that a VCPR established via in-person examination is valid for 12 months, and a VCPR established via "telehealth" methodologies is valid for 6 months, as specified.
- 9) Removes a requirement that VCPR be established on a condition-specific basis.

COMMENTS

Owner Exemption. Current law (BPC Section 4827(a)(1)) exempts from the Practice Act bona fide animal owners, the owner's bona fide employees, and any person assisting the owner gratuitously. In other words, the bona fide owner of an animal can perform any act encompassed under veterinary medicine, or authorize their employees or any other person to do so, so long as the other person does not charge the owner for said services. According to the sponsors, this

"owner exemption" was originally intended to allow ranchers and their employees to treat routine livestock issues, such as administration of medications, castrations and dehorning, or minor wound care. They contend, however, that the broad verbiage of this exemption has created unintended consequences and has led to significant patient harm and death. On the other hand, according to advocates, particularly those representing private and public animal shelters and nonprofit rescues, the ownership exemption is critical to ensuring timely and affordable care in settings where licensed veterinary services are otherwise unavailable. This bill would clarify that the exemption does not apply to a surgical or dental operation on an animal. The bill specifies that an "operation" does not include administering injectable drugs; artificial insemination; castrating male livestock, or dehorning or branding animals; inserting an ID microchip; placing an ID ear tag or tattoo; or venipuncture for diagnostic purposes. In other words, the bill preserves the original intent of the owner exemption by making necessary exceptions for the procedures routinely performed in animal shelters and agricultural settings.

New License Categories. Currently, if a veterinarian from out-of-state wants to become licensed in California, they must submit certified transcripts from their veterinary college, submit a license application and associated fee, submit a live scan, disclose every state, U.S. territory, or Canadian province where they have been licensed, pass an examination concerning California veterinary laws, and most notably, satisfy professional examination requirements by: (1) submitting proof of having taken the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE) within the preceding five years, (2) retake the NAVLE, or (3) submit proof of having practiced veterinary medicine for a minimum of two years and 2,500 hours of clinical practice. Many out-of-state veterinarians seeking licensure in California contend that, specifically, the requirement to submit certified transcripts from their veterinary college, and the requirement to either submit proof of their NAVLE or proof of clinical hours, is overly burdensome and unnecessarily costly. Furthermore, shelters and rescues seeking to work with nonprofits such as Animal Balance—an organization that utilizes vets from around the country to provide spay and neuter services in underserved communities—argue that these requirements make it less lucrative for such organizations to service areas in California.

Therefore, this bill establishes a separate license category, and an associated license fee, for "shelter veterinarians" to specifically assist out-of-state veterinarians who intend to work with shelters and rescues with obtaining California licensure. To qualify for licensure as a shelter veterinarian, an individual must be employed or contracted with an animal shelter and meet all of the same requirements as current law, except for the requirement to submit proof of their NAVLE or clinical hours, and the requirement to submit certified transcripts from their college. To ensure they remain qualified according to professional standards, a shelter veterinarian applicant must instead hold a current, valid veterinary license in another state, U.S. territory, or Canadian province. Finally, to prevent this new category from being used as a loophole to circumvent standard licensure, the bill requires prospective shelter veterinarians to certify that the sole purpose of their license is to practice veterinary medicine for an animal shelter and explicitly prohibits a shelter veterinarian licensee from practicing veterinary medicine in any circumstance other than for an animal shelter.

Additionally, this bill establishes recognized license categories, and respective fees, for retired veterinarians and RVTs, as well as those retired professionals who seek to volunteer at animal shelters. Specifically, the bill establishes that to obtain retired status, a veterinarian or RVT must apply to the CVMB and pay a minor fee, and may only use their professional title if the title "retired" directly precedes or follows it. Further, the bill allows retired veterinary professionals to

volunteer at animal shelters by applying for "retired volunteer" status. In order to qualify for retired volunteer status, a person must either have an active license or registration, or have placed their license in retired status within the preceding five years. If they have been retired for more than five years, they must also certify completion of continuing education, and pass the law examination. Finally, similar to shelter veterinarians, those applying for retired volunteer status must certify that their sole purpose is to provide volunteer services to animal shelters.

Telemedicine. In 2023, the Legislature passed AB 1399 (Friedman, Chapter 475, Statutes of 2023), which established statutory requirements to practice veterinary medicine via telehealth. Since then, both the CVMB and the California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) have noted inconsistencies since the implementation of AB 1399. Specifically, veterinarians report that language in the bill put California out of alignment with national standards and definitions generally governing synchronous audio-video veterinary care. In the veterinary profession, the terms "telemedicine," "teletriage," and "teleconsultation" are all unique, and pertain to specific actions which sponsors argue is not adequately captured under the umbrella term "telehealth" that is used in AB 1399 statute. This bill incorporates those specific definitions for "electronic communication technology", "telemedicine", "teletriage", and "teleconsultation" that the CVMB and co-sponsors contend establish more clarity and flexibility around how veterinarians can deliver services via electronic communication, and makes revisions throughout the Practice Act to conform to these new, more specific definitions.

Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship. The Practice Act requires a veterinarian to establish and maintain a VCPR before providing care for an animal patient. Among other requirements, this relationship is established when the client has authorized the veterinarian to make medical judgments and when the veterinarian has gained sufficient knowledge of the animal to make a diagnosis, generally through an in-person examination. California is one of only two states in the nation that requires VCPRs to be established on a condition-specific, rather than annual, basis. The original intent of this condition-based specificity was to ensure VCPRs established by "telehealth" were not overly broad. Unfortunately, this condition-specific requirement has led to more difficulty and confusion in the timely delivery of veterinary care. In practice, this "condition-specific" VCPR requires that veterinarians must examine an animal patient for any new condition, even if they routinely care for the animal patient for an existing condition. For example, a person who maintains a VCPR with a veterinarian for their dog with a terminal disease finds that their dog has a minor skin irritation; under current law, this person must still bring their dog in to be examined by the same veterinarian before the veterinarian can even discuss potential treatment with the routine client.

This bill clarifies that a VCPR is valid for a set period, rather than for a particular condition. Specifically, this bill specifies that a VCPR exists so long as the veterinarian possesses sufficient knowledge of the animal patient and assumes responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the patient. Further, the bill establishes that a VCPR is valid for one year upon the in-person examination of an animal patient, and for six months if established via telemedicine. Moreover, the bill clarifies that a VCPR may continue to exist in the absence of the establishing veterinarian so long as the originating veterinarian has properly communicated with the subsequent veterinarian, or if the subsequent veterinarian has also examined the animal patient. Finally, the bill makes conforming changes to ensure continuity of care in emergencies or when an animal patient is traveling and needs essential medicine prescribed.

Premises Ownership Disclosures. Notwithstanding rare circumstances, all veterinary medicine in California must be rendered at a registered veterinary premises. Premises can include a building, kennel, mobile unit, or vehicle. To obtain a veterinary premises registration, the owner must submit an application containing specified information. Premises registrations are issued annually and must be renewed. However, current law does not require that any specific information be disclosed or certified as part of this renewal. As such, this bill requires that a premises registration holder must satisfy the same requirements as their initial application regarding ownership disclosures and confirm that the information is current and valid.

According to the Author

"Despite caring deeply for their animal companions, many Californians struggle to procure the veterinary services they require. Often, this hardship is a consequence of cumbersome statute and the state's ongoing veterinary staffing shortage, which leave many communities without accessible care options. AB 1999 addresses these issues by allowing retired veterinary professionals to volunteer their skills at shelters, streamlining licensure for out-of-state veterinarians who wish to work in shelters, and updating Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) statute to allow veterinarians to provide care without re-establishing an existing VCPR. Together, these provisions will remove many of the barriers that currently prevent countless companion animals from receiving the veterinary care they need and deserve."

Arguments in Support

This bill is co-sponsored by the *California Veterinary Medical Board*, who writes, "This bill strengthens consumer and animal protections by prohibiting unlicensed individuals from performing surgeries on their own animals. It also helps address the veterinarian shortage felt in animal shelters throughout California by creating a faster way for out-of-state veterinarians to practice in California animal shelters and creating a way for retired veterinarians and RVTs to volunteer at animal shelters. In addition, consumers will have greater access to care without having to re-establish the VCPR for every medical condition."

Arguments in Opposition

There is no opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, "The CVMB estimates minor and absorbable costs for outreach and education, and a new verification of eligibility on applications. The Department of Consumer Affairs, Office of Information Services estimates one-time costs of \$132,000 to create a new license application and renewal, along with other minor updates, in the online licensing and enforcement system (Veterinary Medical Board Contingent Fund)."

VOTES

ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 19-0-0

YES: Berman, Johnson, Addis, Ahrens, Alanis, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Caloza, Chen, Elhawary, Hadwick, Haney, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Lowenthal, Macedo, Nguyen, Pellerin

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Muratsuchi

UPDATED

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