

THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 1999
Author: Kalra (D), et al.
Amended: 8/6/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE BUS., PROF. & ECON. DEV. COMMITTEE: 11-0, 6/15/26
AYES: Wahab, Choi, Archuleta, Arreguín, Caballero, Grayson, Menjivar, Niello,
Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 6/29/26
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0, 5/11/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Veterinary medicine

SOURCE: California Veterinary Medical Association
California Veterinary Medical Board
San Diego Humane Society
Social Compassion in Legislation

DIGEST: This bill 1) revises requirements for purposes of establishing the Veterinary-Client Patient Relationship (VCPR); 2) establishes a retired license status and a retired volunteer license; 3) creates a designated shelter veterinary license; revises and adds terminology related to telehealth services; and 4) makes numerous other technical and conforming changes related to the veterinary practice act (Act).

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/6 /26 add language to address chaptering issues.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Veterinary Medical Board (VMB) to license and regulate veterinarians, registered veterinary technicians (RVTs), register veterinary premises (premises) and issue veterinary assistant-controlled substance permits (VACSP) and sunsets the VMB and its authority to appoint an Executive Officer on January 1, 2030. (Business and Professions Code (BPC) § 4800, et. seq.)
- 2) Prohibits a veterinarian from prescribing, dispensing, or administering a drug, medicine, application, or treatment of whatever nature for the prevention, cure, relief of a wound, fracture, bodily injury, or disease of animals unless a veterinarian-client patient relationship (VCPR) exists and specifies the conditions under which a VCPR is established, as specified. (BPC § 4826.6)
- 3) Exempts any person from the provisions of the Act who practices veterinary medicine as a bona fide owner of one's own animals, except for cat declawing procedures, including the owner's bona fide employees and any person assisting the owner, provided the practice is performed gratuitously. (BPC § 4827(a)(1))
- 4) Establishes that all veterinary premises registrations shall expire annually at 12 midnight on the last day of the month in which the license premises registration was issued, unless renewed. (BPC § 4900(b))

This bill:

- 1) Adds definitions for electronic communication technology, herd, teleconsultation, telemedicine, telerriage, animal shelter, and rescue group to the Veterinary Act.
- 2) Allows a rabies vaccination to be given to an animal patient without an established VCPR.
- 3) Revises the definition of a VCPR and replaces "telehealth" with "telemedicine".
- 4) 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, subject to certain specifications. Permits the VCPR to continue to exist

in the absence of the veterinarian if all specified conditions are met.

- 5) Authorizes, in the absence of the originally prescribing veterinarian who established the VCPR, the subsequent veterinarian to prescribe, dispense, furnish a refill if specified conditions are met.
- 6) Narrows the “owner exemption” to specify that owners cannot perform any surgical or dental operation upon their animal.
- 7) Defines “operation” as “any procedure performed on an animal in which the skin or tissue of the animal is penetrated or severed”, and excludes administering injectable drugs, artificial insemination, castrating male livestock or dehorning or branding animals, inserting a microchip for identifying an animal, placing an ear tag or tattoo for identifying an animal, and venipuncture for diagnostic purposes.
- 8) Clarifies that the provisions of this bill do not prohibit an organization accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, or a university, college, or governmental research agency from practicing veterinary medicine on an animal owned by that entity.
- 9) Authorizes veterinarians licensed in another state to help a California veterinarian on a specific case through any means, and exempts from the provisions of the Act, a person who is not licensed and provides teleconsultation to a California-licensed veterinarian.
- 10) Clarifies that a RVT may render lifesaving aid through any means including teletriage.
- 11) Deletes the prohibition for a person whose license has been expired for more than five years from renewing, as specified.
- 12) Establishes a retired license for a veterinarian or RVT, exempts a licensee or registrant from CE requirements, prohibits a licensee with retired license status from practicing veterinary medicine and requires the licensee to use the words “retired” directly preceding or following their professional title. Prohibits a retired license from being granted while there is a pending complaint, investigation, or enforcement action against a licensee or registrant or the license or registration has been revoked, surrendered or subject to terms and condition of probation. Prohibits a retired volunteer license or registration

holder from practicing veterinary medicine in any circumstance other than for an animal shelter or specified emergency situations. Requires a retired volunteer license or certification holder to certify that the sole purpose of retired volunteer status is to provide voluntary, unpaid, medical services for an animal shelter.

- 13) Establishes a shelter veterinarian license specific to out-of-state licensed veterinarians and specifies the requirements for licensure as a shelter veterinarian which includes only practicing for an animal shelter, as specified.
- 14) Requires that premises registration holders provide and/or confirm specified information upon renewal of their registration.
- 15) Makes other technical and conforming changes and adds chaptering language.

Background

VMB and the Practice of Veterinary Medicine. The VMB is responsible for ensuring that each licensee or registrant has met the education and examination standards required to provide animal healthcare services. In addition to the licensure of veterinarians, the VMB oversees RVTs and VACSP holders. RVTs are an essential part of the veterinary workforce, performing critical support tasks for animal health care and welfare, typically under the supervision and direction of a licensed veterinarian. VACSP holders are registered with the VMB to obtain controlled substances in a veterinary premises and under supervision of the premises licensee manager. Current law requires that any premises where veterinary medicine, dentistry, or surgery is being practiced obtain a premises permit from the VMB.

The VMB was subject to sunset review in 2025, as part of that process, several priorities were identified, many of which were remedied in AB 1502 (Berman, Chapter 195, Statutes of 2025). However, some of the issues identified during the 2025 Sunset Review were not included in AB 1502, some of which are addressed in this bill.

Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR). The VCPR is an integral part of veterinary medicine and is intended to provide assurances that the client has authorized the veterinarian to assume responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the animal and has communicated with the client a course of treatment appropriate to the circumstance of the animal patient. Pursuant to BPC

§ 4826, a veterinarian is prohibited from administering, prescribing, dispensing or furnishing a drug, medicine, appliance, or the treatment of whatever nature for the prevention, cure, or relief of a wound, fracture or bodily injury or disease of an animal without having first established a VCPR with the animal patient except where the patient is a wild animal or the owner is unknown.

Telehealth. Telehealth in the Act is defined differently than “telehealth” under the Medical Practice Act, which governs most telehealth provisions for healing arts professionals. This bill replaces references to “telehealth” with that of “telemedicine”, which is more widely referenced in veterinary practice community. In addition, this bill adds new definitions for “teletriage” and “teleconsultation” to better align with current veterinary practice standards and to aid efforts to address potential limitations on veterinary access to care issues.

Licensing Exemptions for Veterinary Practice of Own Animals Current law (BPC § 4827(a)(1)) exempts bona fide animal owners, the owner’s bona fide employees, and any person assisting the owner gratuitously from the provisions of the Act. 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 those services. As noted in the VMB’s 2025 Sunset Review Report, The VMB has received complaints against licensed veterinarians alleging veterinarians caused significant harm or death to animal patients. In those cases, licensed veterinarians claim the Board has no jurisdiction, since they were assisting the owner and performed services gratuitously (either by never charging for the specific task or providing a refund after the fact). This bill revises the ownership exemption to clarify that surgery or dental operations are not permitted under the ownership exemption, and further defines what constitutes an operation. Accredited zoos, universities, colleges, or governmental agencies for research purposes can provide veterinary care pursuant to the exemption.

Retired License and Shelter Veterinarian License. This bill establishes a shelter veterinarian license. To be licensed as a designated shelter veterinarian, an applicant must hold an active license issued by another state, be employed by or contract with an animal shelter to provide veterinary care, complete an application and pay the fee, certify that the sole purpose of the shelter veterinarian license is to practice veterinary medicine for an animal shelter, submit fingerprints for a background check, pass an examination, and disclose any disciplinary actions of the license holder. The shelter license is subject to denial and VMB-enforcement.

The VMB does not offer a retired license and instead allows a licensee to have a designated “inactive” license. If a licensee has not renewed their license within five years, they are prohibited from renewing and must reapply for a new license and be subject to new examination requirements. An inactive license holder or a licensee who has not renewed within the five-year period is not authorized to practice veterinary medicine, even if the inactive licensee or non-renewed license holder plans to volunteer their time at shelters, rescues or provide voluntary veterinary services elsewhere. This bill will establish a retired license for veterinarians and RVTs, which would allow the use of their professional titles, with the designation “retired” preceding or following the professional title. Under this retired status designation, the license holder is prohibited from practicing veterinary medicine, and an applicant will not qualify for the retired status if the licensee is subject to a current enforcement investigation by the VMB. This bill also establishes a special “retired volunteer” license or certification designation. 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. Applicants for retired volunteer status must certify the sole purpose is to provide volunteer services to animal shelters.

Registered Veterinary Premises Ownership Disclosures. To obtain a veterinary premises registration, the owner must submit an application that includes the name of each owner or operator of the premises, including the type of corporate entity, if applicable, the name of the premises, and the name of the responsible licensee manager who is to act for and on behalf of the registered premises. Furthermore, if the owner or operator of premises is a corporation, they must disclose the names and titles of all owners, officers, any general partners, and the agent for service of process, and any changes regarding this information must be reported within 30 days. Premises registrations are issued on an annual basis and must be renewed. However, current law does not require that any specific information be disclosed or certified as part of this renewal. This bill requires that a premises registration holder must satisfy the same requirements as their initial application as it relates to ownership disclosures and confirms that the information is current and valid.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.:Yes Local:Yes

According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations, VMB anticipates minor, absorbable costs associated with licensee outreach, education, and applicant eligibility verification for the new license and retired statuses. The Office of

Information Services within the Department of Consumer Affairs reports costs of approximately \$132,000 to create new initial and renewal applications and implement other necessary updates to the BreEZe system, costs which are absorbable within existing resources.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/5/26)

California Veterinary Medical Association (co-source)
California Veterinary Medical Board (co-source)
San Diego Humane Society (co-source)
Social Compassion in Legislation (co-source)
Angel's Furry Friends Rescue
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Rescue Mission
Animal Rescuers for Change
Animal Wellness Action
Berkeley Animal Rights Center
Better Together Forever
Born Again Animal Rescue and Adoption
Collective Fashion Justice
Compassionate Bay
Concerned Citizens Animal Rescue
Earthheart
Feline Lucky Adventures
Greater Los Angeles Animal Spay Neuter Collaborative
Hugs and Kisses Animal Fund
Jaimie Brianna's Legacy Fund
Latino Alliance for Animal Care Foundation
Leaders for Ethics, Animals, and the Planet
Long Beach Spay and Neuter Foundation
Los Angeles County Democrats for the Protection of Animals
Los Angeles Rabbit Foundation
Multiple Individuals
NY 4 Whales
Pibbles N Kibbles Animal Rescue
Plant-based Advocates
Project Minnie
Real Good Rescue
San Diego Companion Rabbit Society
Seeds 4 Change Now Animal Rescue
Seniors Citizens for Humane Education and Legislation

Students Against Animal Cruelty Club - Hueneme High School
 The Canine Condition
 The Pet Loss Support Group
 The Spayce Project
 Underdog Heroes, INC.
 Women United for Animal Welfare

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/5/26)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: A broad coalition of supporters note, “A 2021 national survey shows that 14 California counties ranked in the bottom 25% on the Veterinary Care Accessibility Score, which means there is extremely limited or no ability to see a veterinarian. The overall score for California was 47 out of 100, with the Central Valley and North State faring the worst. By comparison, Nebraska has a score of 71...Yet, veterinary care is exactly what we need to combat pet overpopulation. By updating the Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) law to “patient-specific,” AB 1999 is allowing veterinarians practice more efficiently. By creating “volunteer” and shelter-specific licensing categories, AB 1999 is expanding the pool of veterinary professionals that may offer their services to animal shelters. These aspects of AB 1999 directly help expand access to care in the state and thus will help combat the pet overpopulation crisis. Additionally, by prohibiting owners from performing surgery on their own animals, AB 1999 will also help prevent many animals from suffering at the hands of their medically untrained owners.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 73-0, 5/11/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Ramos, Ransom, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arambula, Lowenthal, Quirk-Silva, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Solache, Soria

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