

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

CSA1 Bill Id:AB 516 Author:(Kalra)

As Amended Ver:June 16, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes registered veterinary technicians (RVTs) and veterinary assistants to perform animal health care services not otherwise prohibited by law or regulation, including on animals housed in public or private animal shelters, humane societies, or societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

Senate Amendments

Make technical, non-substantive changes.

COMMENTS

Veterinarians, RVTs and Veterinary Assistants. In order to practice veterinary medicine and provide healthcare to a variety of animals, veterinarians must secure a license through the VMB. A licensed California veterinarian is authorized to engage in the practice of veterinary medicine, surgery, veterinary dentistry, and related health procedures for the benefit of an animal's general health and wellbeing. Veterinarians are trained and licensed to diagnose, prescribe medication and provide treatment for the animal's health and improvement to the animal's quality of life. Veterinarians are extensively trained, satisfied academic requirements, and provide health care for various animals. Veterinarians receive specific healthcare training as it applies to animals and understanding the nature for the prevention, cure, or relief of a wound, fracture, bodily injury, or disease of animals. In order to practice veterinary medicine in California, an applicant must graduate from a degree program offered by an accredited postsecondary institution or institutions approved by the VMB, pass a national veterinarian examination, and pass an examination provided by the VMB to test the knowledge of the laws and regulations related to the practice of veterinary medicine in California.

RVTs serve a crucial role in the veterinary workforce by providing vital supportive health-related tasks. These health tasks involve drawing blood and conducting laboratory tests, operating radiographic equipment, administering medication, as well as countless other health related procedures. RVTs may perform certain advanced tasks under the direct supervision of a veterinarian, such as the induction of anesthesia, creation a relief hole in the skin to facilitate placement of an intravascular catheter, application casts and splints, performance of dental extractions, suturing of cutaneous and subcutaneous tissues, and more. The VMB's regulations have also stipulated that an RVT may perform a variety of procedures under indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian. These procedures include the act of administering controlled substances and performing certain routine animal health care tasks.

To qualify for registration as an RVT, three pathways to licensure are available. The first requires graduation from an AVMA accredited RVT program or a VMB-approved RVT program. The second pathway, also known as the "alternate route," requires candidates to complete a combination of 20 semester units, or 30 quarter units or 300 hours of specific education and 4,416 hours of directed clinical practice experience completed in no less than 24 months under the direct supervision of a California licensed veterinarian. Upon completion of first two pathways, candidates must then take a national examination. The third pathway, known

as the "Out-of-State Registrant" pathway, is for applicants who are licensed as an RVT in another state, have passed the national examination, and have obtained at least 4,416 hours of directed clinical practice, under the direct supervision of a veterinarian in the 24 months preceding their application.

Veterinary assistants support the delivery of animal healthcare services by performing animal care and administrative tasks under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian or RVT. Veterinary assistants are not licensed or registered by the VMB, and their duties are limited to non-medical or minimally invasive animal care tasks that do not require the clinical judgment or advanced training of veterinarians or RVTs. Common responsibilities include feeding, bathing, and exercising animals, sterilizing surgical and medical equipment, maintaining clean and sanitary conditions in animal care areas, and assisting veterinarians and RVTs during procedures by handling and restraining animals. Veterinary assistants may also provide basic monitoring of animal vital signs and observe animal behavior for changes in condition, reporting concerns to the supervising veterinarian or RVT. Training for veterinary assistants varies and may include on-the-job experience or completion of a certificate program; however, aside from general instruction requirements for certain tasks such as operation radiographic equipment, there is no formal licensing or certification requirement governed by the VMB for veterinary assistants to perform their designated duties.

In 2016, recognizing the need for expanded access to compounded drugs in the veterinary setting, the Legislature established the Veterinary Assistant Controlled Substances Permit (VACSP). Individuals who possess a VACSP are able to perform the functions of a veterinary assistant, but are also approved by the Board to obtain and administer controlled substances. VACSP holders must be at least 18 years of age and must not have been convicted of a state or federal felony controlled substance violation. The VMB conducts a background check to verify VACSP requirements are met. Once the VACSP has been issued, the permit holder is required to establish and maintain a supervisory relationship with a licensed veterinarian.

Expanded Roles for RVTs and Veterinary Assistants. In recent years, there have been efforts to expand the role that RVTs play in the veterinary field, not only to address disparities in veterinary care but to offer further career advancement for experienced RVTs or veterinary assistants that may not have the desire or ability to pursue a full DVM career. Last year the Legislature permitted veterinarians to authorize RVTs to act as an agent of the veterinarian for purposes of establishing a client relationship or administering certain vaccines with the passage of SB 669 (Cortese), Chapter 882, Statutes of 2023. Additionally, in 2021 the VMB promulgated regulations permitting RVTs to perform certain tasks under the direct supervision of a veterinarian, including drug compounding from bulk substances. The regulations also clarified that RVTs may complete other tasks under indirect supervision of a veterinarian, such as the application of casts and splints. These expansions of scope to include less demanding tasks are intended to bridge the gap between the shortage of veterinary professionals and the rising demand for veterinary care.

Nevertheless, veterinary and animal welfare stakeholders—such as the sponsors of this legislation—stated that adoption of these additional tasks and responsibilities among RVTs has been mixed. Stakeholders report that some veterinarians are reticent to authorize certain tasks to RVTs and assistants that are allowed under regulation, such as dental extractions. In other cases, RVTs report hesitance to assume duties now authorized under law or regulation, such as establishing a VCPR for purposes of vaccination, as they are not educated on these statutory and regulatory changes to their profession. As a result, there is concern that some RVTs and veterinary

assistants are not performing the full breadth of tasks authorized under their profession, perpetuating care shortages in certain veterinary settings such as shelters. This legislation, which the author states was crafted in consultation with veterinary professionals and animal welfare organizations alike, seeks to clarify that RVTs and veterinary assistants are allowed to perform tasks that are not explicitly prohibited in statute or regulation and thus encourage greater adoption of these crucial auxiliary and supportive tasks by professionals in the veterinary setting.

According to the Author

"Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVTs) and veterinary assistants are versatile professionals who are allowed to undertake any work task that they are not explicitly forbidden from performing by law. For RVTs specifically, this means that they are allowed to engage in any task that does not constitute surgery, diagnosis, prognosis, or prescription of medication. However, the regulations governing RVT and veterinary assistant job tasks do not clearly convey this fact, instead creating and perpetuating the misconception that these staff are limited to small, exhaustive lists of duties. Unfortunately, this misconception has spread widely, discouraging many veterinarians from fully utilizing their staff. This results in inefficient veterinary practices, which exacerbate California's ongoing veterinary care shortage. AB 516 will address this issue by clarifying that RVTs and veterinary assistants can carry out any task that they are not forbidden from performing by law, ensuring that veterinarians and their staff can work to their full capacity."

Arguments in Support

A broad coalition of supporters of this bill, including the bill's co-sponsors, write the following: "Veterinary technicians and assistants play a critical role in providing care to animals across California, supporting veterinarians in shelters, clinics, and hospitals. Under existing law, RVTs are permitted to perform any duty that does not constitute surgery, diagnosis, prognosis, or prescription of medication. However, current regulations are structured in a way that has led to misinterpretation, causing unnecessary and artificial limitations on the scope of practice for RVTs and veterinary assistants. This has resulted in the underutilization of these skilled professionals, exacerbating the ongoing veterinary care shortage in California." The coalition further writes that "AB 516 provides a straightforward solution by affirming that RVTs and veterinary assistants may perform any task not explicitly prohibited by law, allowing veterinary teams to operate more efficiently and effectively."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill has minor and absorbable costs to the Veterinary Medical Board (VMB) to review regulations for conformity with the provisions of this bill.

VOTES:**ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 17-0-1**

YES: Berman, Flora, Ahrens, Alanis, Bains, Caloza, Chen, Elhawary, Hadwick, Haney, Irwin, Jackson, Krell, Lowenthal, Macedo, Nguyen, Pellerin

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bauer-Kahan

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Sanchez, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 76-0-3

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

ABS, ABST OR NV: Chen, McKinnor, Papan

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

UPDATED

VERSION: June 16, 2025

CONSULTANT: Edward Franco / B. & P. / (916) 319-3301

FN: 0001523