



Maine Veterinary Medical Association

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Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and other Honorable Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee:

My name is Dr. Casey Cole, I'm the chair of the Maine Veterinary Medical Association's legislative committee, and I am testifying in support of LD 528 An Act to Address the Rise in Rabies in Animals by Appointing Certified Rabies Vaccine Administrators. The MVMA is a proponent of preventative medicine, such as vaccination and strongly believes that vaccines are a mainstay in public health policy. Careful expansion of access to vaccines will benefit the State of Maine, but we want to ensure that any changes to existing law has minimal potential negative impact.

The rabies vaccine administrator role is not a new concept and has been done in 2 other states. The critical difference in those states is that the role is a state employee and not a volunteer. We were concerned about that difference as an employee is covered for liability if they, the pet owner, or the pet becomes injured, which is always a possibility when working with animals. A volunteer does not have that coverage. We were also concerned that there wasn't clearly outlined veterinary oversight of the vaccine administrators. If a vaccine complication occurred, such as anaphylaxis, there may be no one for the vaccinator to immediately contact and get directives from on how to proceed, which can potentially be life threatening for the patient.

Our solution to this was the addition of a change of wording to the rabies vaccine laws. The current rabies law states, "The rabies vaccine must be administered by a licensed veterinarian or under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian", we asked for this to be changed to "The rabies vaccine must be administered by a licensed veterinarian, a licensed veterinary technician under indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian, or by a certified rabies vaccinator under indirect supervision of a state veterinarian." This wording ensures that there is clear veterinary oversight and liability of any vaccines administered. Additionally, "indirect supervision" is defined in the Veterinary Practice Act as "any time when a supervisor is not on the premises but is available for consultation on patient care", which would allow licensed veterinary technicians to perform vaccine clinics without a veterinarian present. This would increase access to the vaccine by increasing the number of people able to administer it while still ensuring that those people are trained and knowledgeable. We already brought this suggestion to the Animal Welfare Advisory Council, who agreed with our amendment.

As veterinary health professionals we strongly believe in the role of vaccinations in public health. With this amendment to LD 528, the bill is a reasonable expansion of access to the rabies vaccine for pets in the state while trying to reduce any negative outcomes that could potentially arise. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony today and appreciate the work that this committee does for animal health in the State of Maine.

Sincerely,

Casey Cole, BVM
Legislative Chair
Maine Veterinary Medical Association