

Michigan House of Representatives: Rules and Competitiveness Committee

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The following op-ed summarizes my concerns if House Bill 4912 were to restrict telehealth opportunities by forcing animal owners to do an in-person visit before having access to veterinary telehealth. Such a requirement would be inconsistent with current telemedicine practices for both large and small animals in Michigan, inconsistent with guidelines published by the American Association of State Veterinary Boards, and even inconsistent with human telemedicine practices for patients of all ages.

Michigan should not prohibit a patient from access to telemedicine unless they do an in-person visit beforehand. We should instead trust a licensed veterinarian to make the determination of when and if an in-person visit is necessary. As a Michigan-licensed veterinarian I urge you to support the substitute to House Bill 4912. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

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Let veterinarians help pets, owners with telemedicine

**-Dr. Cheryl Good, Dearborn Family Pet Care & Immediate Past Chair North American Veterinary Community
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2021 Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of Michigan led the nation in assuring that our pets had access to care by requiring veterinarians to use telemedicine to help pet owners, and it made a huge difference.

Before the pandemic, I was just starting to use telemedicine and had a few cases a month, but during the pandemic my cases soared and it became a lifesaver for my team and my clients and their pets. Just like human medicine has learned from legalized telemedicine, it's easier on everyone if they can access medical care through their phones or computers.

In April of this year the Michigan Board of Veterinary Medicine adopted thoughtful rules for using telemedicine after the pandemic, with important guardrails respecting the rights of pet owners and the judgment of veterinarians. These steps were heralded around the country. Regrettably, this situation may be about to change because Michigan's Legislature is considering House Bill 4912.

The bill unfortunately includes a section that would eliminate the ability of a pet owner and veterinarian to start working together through telemedicine. It would force pet owners to actually bring their pet to a veterinary clinic before getting help or advice or as soon as possible after an emergency situation. This bill would move Michigan from being a progressive state that trusts the judgment of its veterinarians, to the back of the line, resisting the technology that will make care more affordable and accessible.

I am a veterinarian with a small practice in Dearborn, and I'm very concerned with this pending restriction. I have a terrific team of three veterinarians, six licensed veterinary technicians, multiple veterinary assistants, client advocates, an inventory specialist and a practice manager who share my concerns.

I recently served as president of the North American Veterinary Community, which is the largest media and continuing education association in the world serving veterinary medicine.

I'm also very active with Friends For Animals of Metro Detroit, a critical shelter serving our community, and am a founding board member of the Veterinary Virtual Care Association. All of these organizations are progressive, forward-looking supporters of veterinary telemedicine and its inherent benefits to pets and their families.

Let veterinary telemedicine open a door and do what it does best: serve as an invaluable resource to pet owners, a critical entry point into the system of veterinary care and a vital benefit to our pets' health and well-being.