



Testimony of Richard Angelo, Legislative Attorney for Best Friends Animal Society, in opposition to House Bill 6195

Good morning Mr. Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Richard Angelo and I am an attorney with Best Friends Animal Society and a resident of Atlas Township in Genesee County, Michigan.

While we commend all legislative efforts to improve the lives of people and their animals in the State of Michigan, HB 6195, as introduced, will have numerous unintended consequences that would negatively impact residents, companion animals, veterinary professionals, animal shelters and the animal welfare community in our state. That is why I urge you to oppose HB 6195 as drafted before you today. We do understand that the bill sponsor is open to potential amendments to address and eliminate some of these unintended consequences. We look forward to those changes and would like to offer our nationwide expertise on these issues in helping to formulate a solution to the issues presented by this bill as introduced.

In the interests of time, I am going to highlight just a few of our concerns with the bill as proposed. As HB 6195 is currently drafted there could be serious detrimental effects on the animals in animal shelters and animal protection shelters by restricting the delegation of tasks. Fewer than 15% of Michigan's animal shelters have a full-time veterinarian on staff. Often, in accordance with existing laws and regulations, trained staff or veterinary technicians provide standard, necessary care to animals present in the shelter, in accordance with a plan and instructions set forth by the shelter veterinarian. An example would be vaccination for certain contagious diseases upon, or shortly after intake at the shelter. This practice is essential in maintaining the health of that individual animal and the health of the shelter populations, as well as help to prevent the spread of contagious disease. HB 6195 would severely limit, or totally eliminate this practice, by imposing the supervisory requirements set forth in the bill. Further, the requirements of the veterinarian client patient relationship ("VCPR") as set forth in the bill will all but eliminate this best practice currently occurring in our shelters, putting all of the animal population at risk.

In addition, costs to MDARD licensed animal shelters and animal protection shelters would increase exponentially in being required to hire a full-time veterinarian to perform these tasks. In a time of shrinking budgets, not to mention the national shortage of licensed veterinarians, the requirements set forth by HB 6195 would have a devastating impact on our shelters statewide.

We also have concerns that the bill will make access to veterinary care more difficult for pet owners. In a time when veterinary practices across the state have had to adjust, limiting appointments and access to their facilities, HB 6195 imposes some very onerous requirements on the establishment of the VCPR which would severely impede the use of telemedicine by veterinary practitioners in our state. During the pandemic, some states and their veterinary boards have been loosening unnecessary restrictions



on the veterinary community, allowing them to use their sound education, experience and judgment to determine how to best serve their clients and their pet companions. HB 6195 takes Michigan in an opposite direction of this trend that is being embraced elsewhere for the benefit of people, their pet companions and the veterinary communities. With the current nationwide shortage of veterinarians, access to care by clients and their pets should be prioritized and easing restrictions on the practice of telemedicine in their veterinary community is one common-sense solution to the problem. The human health industry has recognized this need and has embraced the practice. The veterinary community should be allowed, and encouraged, to follow suit.

As previously mentioned, while we oppose HB 6195 as currently proposed, I and Best Friends' expert staff stand firmly ready to offer our collective expertise and assistance to craft amendments that would not bring about the likely unintentional negative impacts I have mentioned today. Thank you for your time and consideration on this important subject to so many pet-loving Michiganders. With that, I am open to any questions if there are any from the committee.