



Potter League  
*Enriching Lives*



April 24, 2025

Louis Mansolillo  
Committee Clerk  
Rhode Island House Committee on Corporations  
HouseCorporations@rilegislature.gov

Re: Support for Proposed Sub A HB 5555 Veterinary Telemedicine

Dear Mr. Mansolillo, Chair Solomon, Vice Chairs O'Brien and Caldwell, and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of Potter League for Animals, Providence Animal Rescue League, Veterinary Virtual Care Association, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and our thousands of collective members in Rhode Island to express our support for HB 5555 Proposed Sub A, legislation that will expand access to veterinary telemedicine within reasonable safeguards.

Rhode Island animal shelters and pet owners are struggling to access timely veterinary care<sup>1</sup> amidst an ongoing [veterinary shortage](#).<sup>2</sup> Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Census Bureau, and the American Veterinary Medical Association, the most recent [Veterinary Care Accessibility Score](#) for Rhode Island is a 73 out of 100, where 100 reflects very accessible care.<sup>3</sup> While this score is higher than many states, it is consistent with research demonstrating that at least one in four pet owners face significant barriers to veterinary care.<sup>4</sup> Approximately one third of all pets in the U.S. do not see a veterinarian regularly.<sup>5</sup> An estimated 50% of geriatric and senior pets do not see a veterinarian.<sup>6</sup> A recent PetSmart Charities-Gallup Study found that over half (52%) of U.S. pet owners have either skipped or declined necessary veterinary care for their pets, with many expressing an interest in non-traditional care delivery methods like telemedicine to help address barriers to clinical care.<sup>7</sup>

A lack of proper care can lead to treatment needs that are more complex and costly, unnecessary suffering, premature death, and more animals relinquished to shelters.<sup>8</sup> Improving access to veterinary care can help keep pets in loving homes and out of Rhode Island's overburdened shelters.<sup>9</sup> A national study showed that 40% of low-income owners who rehomed their pets reported that access to affordable vet care would have helped them keep their pet.<sup>10</sup>

While the shortage of veterinarians may worsen problems with access to care in the coming years, increasing access to veterinary telemedicine can help mitigate the effects of the shortage.<sup>11</sup> A study released in September 2024 by the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges, titled "Demand for and Supply of Veterinarians in the U.S. to 2032," found that "there will be a severe and growing unmet need for veterinarians in coming years – one that upcoming program expansions and additions will be insufficient to meet," noting, "A robust network of telehealth providers could make it easier for pet owners in underserved communities to access veterinary services, improving the health of their companion animals and reducing the stress of veterinarians serving in these areas."<sup>12</sup>

Safe, convenient veterinary telemedicine can help address many common barriers to care faced by senior pet owners, as well as those who live in rural or underserved areas, face transportation issues, have large, fearful, or potentially aggressive animals, or need to access veterinary services outside of normal clinic hours due to work schedules or time-sensitive pet issues. Conditions such as eye, ear, or skin issues, common flea and tick prevention and treatment medications, initial assessment of gastrointestinal or mobility issues, as well as hospice, behavioral, or nutritional consultations are among the many situations that can be appropriate for veterinary telemedicine at the discretion of the licensed veterinarian. Telemedicine technology is an optional tool for care delivery; if a veterinarian does not wish to use telemedicine or believes they cannot properly diagnose a particular condition over telehealth, they simply ask the pet owner to bring the animal in for a clinical examination.



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In outdated veterinary laws, the in-person examination requirement is the primary regulatory barrier to veterinary telehealth, preventing veterinarians from offering any veterinary telemedicine services unless they have first examined the patient in person, even if an exam may not be necessary for the needed care or when the pet owner faces barriers to accessing clinical veterinary care. All 50 states have laws that empower physicians to use telehealth as an additional tool to establish new doctor-patient relationships and treat patients, including babies and other nonverbal patients.<sup>13</sup> Since 2018, the American Association of Veterinary State Boards has supported similarly enabling new veterinary-client-patient-relationship (“VCPR”) establishment via telehealth “consistent with regulations...that permit physicians to establish relationships with human patients remotely, no face-to-face visit required.”<sup>14</sup> A growing number of states either have no VCPR in law or enable licensed veterinarians to treat new or lapsed patients by using telemedicine technology to establish a relationship (NY, CA, FL, ID, VT, NJ, VA, AZ).<sup>15</sup>

The undersigned groups respectfully request your support for HB 5555 Proposed Sub A. This legislation will modernize Rhode Island’s veterinary laws and effectively expand access to veterinary care for pet owners of all income levels and residences in the state, as well as for veterinarians who wish to offer in-demand telemedicine services to more clients. We appreciate your consideration of our views. Please reach out to us if we can provide additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Hobgood, Ph.D.  
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[Jen.Hobgood@aspca.org](mailto:Jen.Hobgood@aspca.org)

On behalf of the following organizations:

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)  
Potter League for Animals  
Providence Animal Rescue League  
Veterinary Virtual Care Association

cc:

Speaker Shekarchi, [rep-shekarchi@rilegislature.gov](mailto:rep-shekarchi@rilegislature.gov)  
Sen. Murray, [sen-murray@rilegislature.gov](mailto:sen-murray@rilegislature.gov)  
Rep. Brien, [rep-brien@rilegislature.gov](mailto:rep-brien@rilegislature.gov)

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<sup>1</sup> Lopez, Jill. “Riverside, Rhode Island’s Low-Income Veterinary Clinic to Close Amid Rising Costs and Economic Challenges.” 21 March 2025. <https://www.myvetcandy.com/blog/2025/3/21/riverside-rhode-islands-low-income-veterinary-clinic-to-close-amid-rising-costs-and-economic-challenges>

“About Pets in Need.” Potter League. <https://potterleague.org/veterinary/pets-in-need-clinic/pets-in-need/>  
According to the Rhode Island Veterinary Access to Care Coalition, “In Rhode Island, thousands of people and their pets face challenges in accessing adequate veterinary care. This issue is multifaceted, encompassing concerns related to income inequality, transportation accessibility, language barriers, and the veterinary industry, among others.” Source: <https://ripetcare.org/about>

<sup>2</sup> Gitter, RJ, Meek, JA, LaFayette, B. “Demand for and Supply of Veterinarians in the U.S. to 2032. June 7, 2024.”

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Available online at: <https://www.aavmc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Demand-for-and-Supply-of-Veterinarians-in-the-U.S.-to-2032-New.pdf>

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<sup>3</sup> Veterinary Care Accessibility Project. Veterinary Care Accessibility Map. <https://www.accesstovetcare.org/vcas-map>

<sup>4</sup> Univ. of Tennessee College of Social Work. (2018) Access to Veterinary Care: Barriers, Current Practices, and Public Policy <https://pphe.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/avcc-report.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Malinda Larkin. "New, Old Challenges Beg for Radical Change in Veterinary Profession." *JAVMA News* (2020). <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2020-12-15/new-old-challenges-beg-radical-change-veterinary-profession>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.drmarygardner.com/geriatric-pets>

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/659057/pet-owners-skipped-declined-veterinary-care.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Univ. of Tennessee College of Social Work. (2018) Access to Veterinary Care: Barriers, Current Practices, and Public Policy <https://pphe.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/avcc-report.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Bawden, Sarah and Kayla Fish. "'Out of space': RI animal shelters facing capacity crisis with more surrenders than adoptions." WPRI.com. 26 July 2024. <https://www.wpri.com/news/local-news/west-bay/ri-animal-shelters-facing-capacity-crisis-with-more-surrenders-than-adoptions/>. Accessed 21 April 2025.

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<sup>10</sup> Weiss, E., Gramann, S., Spain, V., & Slater, M. (2015). "Goodbye to a good friend: An exploration of the rehoming of cats and dogs in the U.S." *Open Journal of Animal Sciences*. 5: 435-456.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder, Alec. (2021). Covid-19 pandemic magnifies workforce crisis in veterinary field. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/20/us/vet-tech-shortage-burnout/index.html>

*Today's Veterinary Business*. (2022). AVMA is Urged to Address Veterinarian Shortage.

<https://todaysveterinarybusiness.com/avma-veterinary-shortage-letter/Veterinary-Practice-News>. (2020). Staffing shortage threatens health of 75 million pets by 2030: Banfield addressed industry-wide shortage at its annual summit. <https://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/75-million-pets-may-lose-access-to-care-by-2030/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aavmc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Demand-for-and-Supply-of-Veterinarians-in-the-U.S.-to-2032-New.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2018-10/ama-chart-telehealth-patient-physician-relationship.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.aavsb.org/Download?url=s/zvw7kz187dic8zu/Guidelines%20for%20Telehealth.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://vvca.org/resources/telemedicine-map/>