



Potter League
Enriching Lives



RHODE ISLAND
SPCA
RHODE ISLAND SOCIETY FOR THE
PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS



PROVIDENCE ANIMAL
RESCUE LEAGUE



PETS
Partnership for Expanded
Telemedicine Services

January 20, 2026

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 7020 Relating to Businesses and Professions—Veterinary Practice

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

On behalf of Potter League for Animals, Rhode Island SPCA, Providence Animal Rescue League, Partnership for Expanded Telemedicine Services (PETS), American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and our thousands of collective members in Rhode Island, we are writing to respectfully request your yes vote on HB 7020 (Brien), bipartisan legislation that will expand access to [veterinary telemedicine](#).

Rhode Island animal shelters and pet owners are struggling to access timely veterinary care¹ amidst an ongoing [veterinary shortage](#).² A lack of proper care can lead to costly and more complex treatment needs, and cause unnecessary suffering, premature death, and more animals relinquished to shelters.³ Improving access to veterinary care can help keep pets in loving homes and out of Rhode Island's overburdened shelters.⁴ 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.⁵

Increasing access to veterinary telemedicine can help mitigate the effects of the veterinary workforce shortage.⁶ 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 problems, 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 is an optional tool for care delivery. Nothing in this legislation requires a veterinarian to utilize telehealth technology. 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. Under HB 7020, only Rhode Island licensed veterinarians will be able to provide telemedicine to RI residents. We trust that our highly skilled Rhode Island licensed veterinarians can determine when an animal can be helped through telemedicine and when they need to see a doctor in person. 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.⁷ Over 100 million Americans live in states where they can begin a new relationship with a veterinarian over telemedicine—including Arizona, California, Florida, Ohio, New Jersey, Virginia, Idaho, and Vermont. Currently, bills are pending to enable an e-VCPR in Massachusetts, Michigan, Washington, and New Hampshire.

HB 7020 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 support for this legislation in 2025 and hope you will support the passage of HB 7020. Please contact us with any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Hobgood, Ph.D., Senior Director, Access to Care Policy, ASPCA

On behalf of the following organizations: ASPCA, Potter League for Animals, Providence Animal Rescue League, Rhode Island SPCA, and PETS

cc: Sen. Murray, Rep. Brien



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¹ 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>

² Gitter, RJ, Meek, JA, LaFayette, B. "Demand for and Supply of Veterinarians in the U.S. to 2032. June 7, 2024." 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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³ 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>.

⁴ 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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"Why RI animal shelters, veterinarians are swamped." *The Providence Journal*. 9 Dec 2022.

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

⁶ 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/>

⁷ <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2018-10/ama-chart-telehealth-patient-physician-relationship.pdf>