

Chair Solomon, Vice Chairs O'Brien and Caldwell, and members of the House Corporations Committee,

Thank you for the committee's thoughtful consideration of RI H7020 and for voting the bill out of committee during the 2025 legislative session.

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Partnership for Expanded Telemedicine Services (PETS), a global nonprofit dedicated to establishing best practices and quality standards for veterinary virtual care. PETS strongly supports RI H7020, which allows veterinarians to establish a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) through electronic means.

Access to Care and the Veterinary Shortage

The United States is facing a well-documented, national shortage of veterinarians, with demand for veterinary services continuing to rise. This strain is felt most acutely in rural and underserved communities, where limited provider availability, travel distance, and cost already restrict access to care. Telemedicine is not a replacement for hands-on veterinary medicine, but it is a proven tool that helps veterinarians extend their reach, prioritize in-person care when necessary, and connect pets and owners to guidance sooner—before issues escalate.

We Know Telemedicine Works

Telemedicine is now a well-established part of human healthcare in all 50 states. It has expanded access for senior citizens, people with disabilities, families with infants, and others who rely on caregivers to communicate on their behalf. Pets face similar barriers: they cannot speak for themselves and depend entirely on their owners to access care. Veterinary telemedicine follows this same trusted model—allowing licensed professionals to assess, advise, and determine when in-person care is required.

States Moving Forward

Rhode Island would not be acting alone. In recent years, Arizona, California, Florida, and Ohio have enacted telemedicine VCPR legislation with broad bipartisan support. Today, nine states permanently allow a VCPR to be established via telemedicine, and additional states—including Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Washington—are actively considering similar policies. These laws reflect growing confidence that telemedicine can be safely integrated into veterinary practice.

Animal Welfare and Sheltering Impacts

Access to veterinary care is one of the most significant factors influencing animal welfare and shelter intake. Pets that go without care are more likely to experience preventable illness and are at greater risk of being surrendered to shelters. Telemedicine allows veterinarians to intervene earlier, support responsible pet ownership, and help families

keep pets in their homes. For shelters and rescues, improved access to veterinary guidance supports triage, follow-up care, and better outcomes for animals already in the system.

RI H7020 represents a responsible, modern approach to improving access to veterinary care while maintaining professional standards and patient safety. We respectfully urge continued support for removing the in-person requirement to establish a VCPR and enabling telemedicine as an option for Rhode Island veterinarians and pet owners.

Thank you again for your leadership on this issue. We welcome the opportunity to answer questions or provide additional information.

Respectfully,
Katie Jarl
Partnership for Expanded Telemedicine Services (PETS)

