



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
235 Promenade Street, Room 425
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chairman
House Committee on Judiciary
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 5926 An Act Relating to Animals and Animal Husbandry – Cruelty to Animals

Dear Chairman Craven,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 5926, which would create a cause of action for pet owners to seek damages when another person causes injury or death to their pet. DEM is not taking a position on this legislation but wishes to provide the Committee with information about potential ramifications if it becomes law.

DEM believes that this legislation would result in the cost of veterinary care increasing at a time when it is already high due to a shortage of veterinarians. Allowing veterinarians to be sued for damages above the value of an animal will likely lead to insurance companies increasing the cost of liability insurance coverage and these costs will be passed on to pet owners. A potential indirect effect of this legislation is veterinarians adopting the practice of “defensive medicine” whereby they may be inclined to order tests or procedures that are not medically necessary to shield themselves from liability.

Furthermore, we note that this bill broadly applies to any individual who provides services to pets including pet sitters, dog walkers, groomers, and trainers, among others. Any individuals or entities not required to be licensed may lack appropriate insurance and therefore could have considerably liability exposure if this proposal becomes law. For example, an individual agreeing to watch their neighbor’s dog or cat while they are on vacation could face liability exposure not covered by their existing insurance.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Scott Marshall, DVM (RI State

Veterinarian) at scott.marshall@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terrence Gray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Terrence" on the top line and "Gray" on the bottom line.

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
The Honorable Thomas Noret
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director