



May 20, 2026

Chair V. Susan Sosnowski
Senate Committee on Environment and Agriculture
Rhode Island Senate
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: VETERINARY SUPPORT Telemedicine, SB 3180

Dear Chair Sosnowski, Vice Chair Britto, and Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Agriculture:

On behalf of our Rhode Island supporters and veterinary professional members, Humane World for Animals (formerly Humane Society of the United States) and Humane Veterinary Medical Alliance (HumaneVMA), we are writing to support Senate Bill 3180. SB 3180 modernizes veterinary care by expanding access to telemedicine for companion animals.

One of the first barriers to accessing veterinary care is clients getting in the door. Many families have time constraints that are incompatible with the hours veterinary clinics keep or have transportation issues and cannot travel to an office. Some families have a pet who is extremely stressed or frightened by visiting a veterinary clinic. There are numerous scenarios where virtual care could alleviate those problems. Veterinarians are already using techniques to establish veterinary-client-patient relationships (VCPRs) without ever touching an animal, for example using low-stress handling. In situations where a pet is acting reactively, veterinarians may choose not to perform physical examinations but instead rely upon visual cues and patient history. SB 3180 gives veterinarians the ability to exercise their professional judgement in making clinical decisions about a patient's health.

Veterinarians have undergone rigorous education and training, and we should trust their judgement in practicing veterinary medicine, including in determining whether it is appropriate to establish a VCPR virtually. By allowing practices to establish or maintain a VCPR virtually with appropriate guardrails, communities that have been traditionally underserved will have increased access to critically important veterinary care.

Pet companionship should not be reserved solely for those above a certain income threshold. Pets offer joy and comfort to their families, and it has been well-documented that companion animals also provide numerous physical and mental health benefits. However, when families lack access to essential veterinary care, both people and animals can experience significant stress and trauma. Too often, this results in the heartbreaking relinquishment of pets, creating negative effects for families, pets and already-strained shelters.

As cited in the Rhode Island Community Pet Project, an estimated 147,000 pets are living with families experiencing poverty across Rhode Island. These are pets who could benefit greatly from access to quality veterinary care. This immense number includes only those living with families at or below the federal poverty line; it does not include the thousands more with families hovering just above that line and still facing financial challenges.

Policies and laws that limit telemedicine services, thereby triggering the associated costs of getting a pet to a veterinary clinic, contribute to this crisis. Transporting a pet to a clinic can involve the loss of wages due to taking time off of work and possibly even the cost of childcare. The round-trip cost of transportation and fuel for travel (if that is even an option) can be significant, particularly for those in rural and underserved areas.



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The US - including Rhode Island - is experiencing a widespread shortage of veterinary professionals. Limited access and sparse availability of appointments have intensified an already difficult situation for many Rhode Islanders.

It is important to note that we support SB 3180 as it relates to pets but emphasize that it should not apply to companion animals in commercial settings like puppy mills or pet stores. We are happy to work with the sponsors on clarifying language if deemed necessary.

Telemedicine is an effective method for providing equitable access to veterinary care. It was utilized without incident in numerous states during the pandemic and has been implemented permanently in multiple states including California, Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio, Vermont, and Virginia. If SB 3180 passes, Rhode Island pet owners will have much-needed greater access to quality veterinary care for their beloved animals and veterinarians will have the discretion to decide if they want to use telemedicine as a tool to reach more people and pets. We are not advocating for any mandate by the legislature requiring veterinarians to offer telemedicine services. Rather, we only ask that licensed veterinarians be granted the opportunity and freedom to exercise their professional judgement in their practice.

We thank the committee for your attention to this important issue and urge the committee to vote favorably on SB 3180 to better serve Rhode Island's pet owners and veterinary community.

Respectfully,

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