



Memorandum in Support

COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW

Animals #26

January 23, 2024

S.7608

By: Senator Gianaris

A.7903

By: M. of A. Rosenthal

Senate Committee: Higher Education

Assembly Committee: Higher Education

Effective Date: 90th day after it shall have
become a law

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to authorizing veterinarians to provide free veterinary care services to individuals in shelters to receive mandatory continuing education credit

LAW AND SECTIONS REFERRED TO: Paragraph (a) of subdivision 2 of Section 6704-a of the Education Law is amended by adding a new subparagraph (iii)

THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW **SUPPORTS THE LEGISLATION**

This bill amends Section 6704-a of the Education Law to allow veterinarians to receive continuing education credits in exchange for providing free services to the companion animals of those individuals living in shelters and temporary housing throughout New York. In New York, to renew their licenses, veterinarians must complete 45 hours of continuing education over the course of three years, half of which (22.5 hours) may be self-instructional coursework.

This bill builds on 2016's amendment to Section 6704-a of the Education Law which expanded the definition of "self-instructional coursework" to allow veterinarians to receive continuing education credits in exchange for providing free spay and neuter services in conjunction with a municipal, not-for-profit or other allowable program. Routine veterinary care is an essential part of keeping an animal healthy, preventing the spread of disease, and increasing his or her longevity. This bill recognizes that individuals in temporary housing and shelters might otherwise not be able to access routine or other medical care for their companion animals.

Opinions expressed are those of the Section/Committee preparing this memorandum and do not represent those of the New York State Bar Association unless and until they have been adopted by its House of Delegates or Executive Committee.

Tens of thousands of people are in the NYC shelter system alone.¹ Many are turned away.² Others may not even seek housing assistance because they are unable to locate a shelter that allows them to bring their companion animals with them.³ Every night there are people who sleep on the streets or huddle down in their cars so that they do not have to add losing their companion animals to the many other stresses and losses they are experiencing.

As with the cost of many necessities, the cost of veterinary care has increased, with the cost of veterinary care increasing at a higher-than-average rate during the period from October 2020 until October 2023. During this same period, shelters have seen an increase in stray or homeless animal intakes.⁴ While many people may not be able to afford it, the importance of preventive measures such as vaccines and routine veterinary care should not be overlooked. The availability of free veterinary services may be the difference between a companion animal becoming a “stray” and being able to stay with their family in temporary housing. Preventing stray animals might alleviate demand on animal shelters. Knowing that the companion animals of individuals staying in shelters and temporary housing are more likely to receive routine care including vaccines may encourage more human shelters to allow people to bring along their companion animals. This change in policy, in turn, may change whether an individual or family seeks shelter or not.

The American Veterinary Medicine Association (“AVMA”) has recognized the importance of providing necessary medical care to the companion animals of unhoused and other low-income families. In July 2022, during the annual convention of the AVMA in Philadelphia, a special clinic was held to provide free veterinary care to the companion animals of local unhoused people.⁵ Dr. Jose Arce, the President of the AVMA, captured the need for initiatives that would provide free care to the companion animals of unhoused people, when stating “Pets offer us love and companionship, and in return we need to provide them with care and nutrition, but when the owner

¹ “Stats and Reports.” NYC DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES www.nyc.gov/site/dhs/about/stats-and-reports. Accessed 21 Nov. 2023.

² 2021 New York State Gender-Based Violence Dashboard: Domestic Violence Shelters. NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. <https://opdv.ny.gov/2021-new-york-state-gender-based-violence-dashboard>. Accessed 21 Nov. 2023.

³ See, *Keeping People and Pets Together*” pg. 3 ENDDHOMELESSNESS.ORG (12 Mar. 2020) endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Keeping-People-and-Pets-Together-031220.pdf. Accessed 21 Nov. 2023.

⁴ *Industry Trends Dashboard: Intakes*. SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT. THE NATIONAL DATABASE., www.shelteranimalscount.org/industry-trends-dashboard/. Accessed 21 Nov. 2023.

⁵ AVMA, Merck Animal Health and Hill’s Pet Nutrition Join The Street Dog Coalition to Offer Free Veterinary Clinic for the Pets of People Experiencing Homelessness in Philadelphia. AMERICAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (July 31,2022) www.avma.org/news/press-releases/avma-merck-animal-health-and-hills-pet-nutrition-join-street-dog-coalition. Accessed 21 Nov. 2023.

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is homeless, sometimes giving the animal everything that it needs is challenging.”⁶ This need applies when an individual is living in a shelter or temporary housing.

The Committee agrees with the sponsor’s message in the memo in support, that this amendment “will help keep pets healthy and ensure their caretakers can continue to enjoy their companionship.”⁷ Individuals in temporary housing are already facing a difficult time in their lives and should not feel forced to surrender their beloved companion animals due to a lack of access to proper veterinary care.

For the foregoing reasons, the Committee on Animals and the Law **SUPPORTS** the passage and enactment of this legislation.

⁶⁶ Id.

⁷ *New York Senate Introducer’s Memorandum in Support*. Sponsor: Gianaris; Bill Number S.7608, 2023.