

Memorandum in Support

COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW

Animals #16-a

January 20, 2026

S.6821

By: Senator Gianaris

A.1945

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 THIS LEGISLATION

This bill amends Section 6704-a of the Education Law by adding a new subparagraph (iii) to subdivision (2) of paragraph (a) to provide that licensed veterinarians may receive up to three hours of continuing education credit for providing free veterinary care to the companion animals of those individuals receiving temporary housing assistance at a family shelter, shelter for adults, hotel providing temporary emergency shelter, emergency apartment, domestic violence shelter, runaway and homeless youth shelter, or safe house for refugees. In New York, as a condition of their triennial license renewal, 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 the 2016 amendment to Section 6704-a of the Education Law, which expanded the definition of “self-instructional coursework” to allow veterinarians to receive up to three hours of continuing education credits by providing free spay and neuter services in conjunction with a program at a municipal shelter, not-for-profit society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, humane society, or animal protection association. 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.

As with the cost of many necessities, the cost of veterinary care has increased. During the period from October 2020 until October 2023, the cost of veterinary care increased at a higher-

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.

than-average rate. During this same time period, animal shelters have seen an increase in stray or homeless animal intakes.¹ 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 may also alleviate the demands on animal shelters. Knowing that the companion animals of individuals staying in shelters and temporary housing were more likely to receive routine care including vaccines could encourage more human shelters to allow people to bring their companion animals with them. This change in policy, in turn, may change whether an individual or family seeks shelter or not.

Tens of thousands of people are in the NYC shelter system alone.² Many are turned away.³ Others may not even seek housing assistance because they are unable to locate a shelter that can accommodate their companion animals, allowing them to bring their companion animals with them into the shelter.⁴ The National Alliance to End Homelessness⁵ conducted a survey to assess why individuals experiencing homelessness avoid shelters, and 22% of respondents indicated that they avoided shelters because their pet was not allowed to be with them. 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 others stresses and losses they are experiencing.

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 2023, during the annual convention of the AVMA in Denver, a special clinic was held to provide free veterinary care to the companion animals of local unhoused people.⁶ The AVMA’s press release regarding the event captures the need for initiatives that provide free care to the companion animals of unhoused people, stating “Pets give their humans love, companionship and protection, and in return their owners want to give them the medical care, nutrition and comfort they need and deserve. But for owners experiencing

¹ *Industry Trends Dashboard: Intakes. SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT. THE NATIONAL DATABASE.*, <https://www.shelteranimalscount.org/intake-outcome-dashboard>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2025.

² “*Stats and Reports.*” NYC DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dhs/about/stats-and-reports.page>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2025.

³ *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 13 Apr. 2025.

⁴ See, *Keeping People and Pets Together;* pg. 3, <https://ENDHOMELESSNESS.ORG> (12 Mar. 2020). endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Keeping-People-and-Pets-Together-031220.pdf. Accessed 13 Apr. 2025.

⁵ <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Keeping-People-and-Pets-Together-031220.pdf> at Note 10 (accessed Mar. 7, 2025).

⁶ ***Free clinic is sponsored by Merck Animal Health, Hill’s Pet Nutrition and Western Veterinary Partners***
AMERICAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,
July 13, 2023, <https://www.avma.org/news/press-releases/avma-street-dog-coalition-partner-help-pets-people-experiencing-homelessness>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2025.

homelessness, providing that level of care to their pets can be a real challenge.”⁷ This need applies when an individual is living in a shelter or temporary housing.

The Committee agrees with the sponsor’s message in their Memorandum in Support, that this amendment “will help keep pets healthy and ensure their caretakers can continue to enjoy their companionship.”⁸ 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.

⁷ Id.

⁸ *New York Senate Introducer’s Memorandum in Support*. Sponsor: Gianaris; Bill Number S.6821, 2025.