

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6504

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL WELFARE.

Vote Date: 3/29/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/3/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The Department of Agriculture (DOAG) request technical changes to ensure animals are properly cared for and DOAG has the regulatory framework for enforcement.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 5592

Section 1 removed definition of "Animal" and reference to poultry and any bird, amphibian, fish or reptile offered for sale by a pet shop.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Brian Hurlburt, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture

HB6504 makes changes to regulations to update information for policy and enforcement.

Section 3 changes brings language changes to comply with federal policies for definition of service animal.

Sections 4,5 and 8 change the definition from “the Chief Animal Control Officer, any animal control officer, or any municipal or regional animal control officer” to statutes authorizing the appointment of animal control officers.

Section 6 allows municipalities to create mutual aid agreements for animal control officers to be temporarily assigned to their town, not to exceed 90 days.

Section 7 moves the approval process of creating Regional Pounds from the legislative body to the board of selectmen, town council or other governing board. Regional Pounds need to meet the same requirements as municipal pounds.

Section 12 changes the rabies quarantine period from 6 months to 4 months in accordance with National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control Committee.

Sections 13 and 14 increases reimbursements for vets to spray/neuter pets and a funding increase for the feral cat program.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Mary Mushinsky, Representative, CT House of Representatives

Requests an amendment like HB5452 to include the recognition of therapy dogs. Therapy dogs are not service animals as defined under federal regulations, as service animals serve one specific person with disabilities. Therapy dogs work in the community to assist groups of people and are not emotional support animals. New York Department of Agriculture does recognize and describe therapy dogs, this definition can be used in Connecticut.

Connecticut has an animal population control program, known as spray-neuter, under the DOAG. The program has been successful in nearly eliminating euthanizing unwanted animals. The current fees paid to veterinarians listed in statute is too low. Several veterinarians have dropped out of the program because they are not fairly compensated for their services. These fees should be updated to some recognized index.

Jo-Ann Basile, Executive Director, CT Votes for Animals

CT Votes for Animals (CVA) supports HB6504 to increase the funding increase available to sterilize and vaccinate feral cats. The program has been very successful. HB6504 supports an increase to veterinarian vouchers to offset the rate of inflation for continued participation. Without the increase in funding, veterinarians will find it hard to continue participation. CVA encourages the committee to review and consider lowering the mandatory \$300,000 limit for low-income vouchers. The \$300,000 limit was reached six months early and cannot be re-issued until the next fiscal year.

Annie Hornish, Connecticut Senior State Director, The Humane Society of the United States

The Humane Society of the United States supports the reduction of the rabies quarantine from six months to four months aligns Connecticut with best practices recommended. The bill increases funding of the Feral Cat Grant program from 10% to 20% and of the Animal Population Control Program increased funding.

Connecticut Humane Society

Supports HB6441 apart from the use outdated municipal control facility regulations. The legislation encourages the use of municipal regulations, last updated in 1963, if an animal control program regionalizes and builds a new facility. Connecticut Humane Society requests reference to building regional facilities be removed until new standards are developed.

Stacey Ober, Legislative Analyst and Community Outreach Coordinator, New England, AKC Government Relations

The American Kennel Club (AKC) supports HB6504 for passage. AKC requests the HB6504 be amended to include Rep. Mushinsky's proposal to the state issuance of certified therapy dog tags. Therapy dogs are important to helping people with a positive emotional effect. AKC recognizes therapy dogs that are registered with therapy dog organizations that evaluate the dog-handler team and training for certification to provide animal-assisted interventions. AKC supports the identifying tag, at expense to the owner, indicating the dog's qualifications.

The Environment Committee received more than 25 additional testimonials in support of HB6504.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Laura Simon, President, Connecticut Wildlife Rehabilitators Association

Primary objection is to change the definition of "animal" per CGS 22-327. Making the definition of animal apply only to domestic animals and pets apply in one section but not another creates confusion and enforcement. The new definition of "animal" does not appear to apply to wildlife. This causes confusion over language and intent of enforcement of animal cruelty defined in CGS 22 Section 329. The purpose of CGS 22 Section 329 was designed to protect all animals.

Euthanasia of domestic animals by veterinarians is understood by the Connecticut Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (CWRA). If a wild animal is suffering, it is not practical to require the services of a veterinarian, euthanasia may be necessary by police or animal control officer. CWRA requests language clarification to allow euthanasia of wildlife.

Reported by: Steve Smith

Date: 4/7/2021